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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Spache, George D.

Good Reading for the Disadvantaged Reader

Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1970. Pp. vii, 201

In a current adventure book, an allegory of rare beauty, the title character, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, who, more than anything else, loved to fly at high speed, finds himself "smashed down into a brick-hard sea . . . As he sank low in the water, a strange hollow voice sounded within him. There's no way around it. I am a seagull. I am limited by my nature. I must forget this foolishness. I must fly home to the Flock and be content as I am, as a poor limited seagull."¹

As he is helped to find and understand his true self, capable of peak performance, such as most gulls never achieve, he counsels the young gulls, "You need to keep finding yourself, a little more each day. . . . You need to understand him and to practice him . . . Look with your understanding, find out what you already know and you'll see the way to fly."²

Dr. Spache seems to sense this deep, human need for a positive self-image as he directs this new book, *Good Reading for the Disadvantaged Reader*, to teachers who attempt to promote insightful reading among their pupils, helping them to find and understand themselves as worthy members of a respectable group. In the Introduction, the author reveals the two-fold purpose of the book: to alert teachers to the need to help pupils find books to read in which they will find positive images of their races or ethnic types with which to identify; to guide teachers of children of disadvantaged minority groups to some new approaches in reading instruction aimed at improvement in learning this foundational ability.

The bulk of the volume contains listings of books and other teaching materials. Some of them are background/historical materials regarding an ethnic group. Other listings are combinations of historical and contemporary literature. There are also sections of instructional aids to help teachers conduct activities concerned with some cultural

¹ Richard Bach, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, pp. 20-21. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.

² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

aspect of a minority group. Books related to art, music, literature, and history of these minority groups are recommended. Other sections include instructional materials for social science and science units, and for reading improvement; audio-visual resources and reference materials for teachers; and a listing of items valuable in dealing with problems of adult literacy, an area closely related to the teaching of minority groups. All of these listings, together with the Appendices, for maximum use and efficiency, make this text a major source book in its field. In addition, the first three chapters, expository in form, enhance its value.

These well-documented writings, dealing with the self-concept, and reading instruction of the disadvantaged, serve as a scientific and theoretical rationale for the main premises of the book. More than this, they speak for the spirit of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, within all teachers, and all children, who fight constantly for a feeling of competency, coming to terms with themselves and their environments. Here Dr. Spache reminds his readers that "the identification of self, and the recognition of the underlying feelings, is not a brief development." Further, he says, "We must conduct a constant campaign to build a positive, wholesome view of life." He seems to keep reminding teachers what Jonathan learned, "The gull sees farthest who flies highest."³ In the third chapter he explains and summarizes instructional practices geared to teachers of disadvantaged children. Good teachers everywhere will recognize them as practices which promote effective teaching and learning with all children. He suggests that teachers give their pupils individual, positive attention; vary the learning environment, letting children participate in selecting activities; be affectionate; gratify children's needs by pacing activities as needed; encourage children's exploitation of materials, of space; provide direct and vicarious cultural experiences; vary the physical environment; provide stimulating toys and centers of interest; recognize that group play is important to language development; permit and promote spontaneity of expression; and use positive comments to help children to organize their thoughts and express their ideas.

The over-all, pervasive tone of the author appears to agree with the findings of Lois Murphy and her colleagues at the Menninger Foundation concerning children's learning and development. They maintain that successful coping efforts of children give them not only competence, but a feeling of competence. This feeling predisposes and

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

equips them for more efforts. “The child creates his identity through his efforts in coming to terms with the environment in his own personal way.”⁴ Reading the right book at the right time can facilitate this very personal, creative process.

⁴ Waetjen, Walter, and Leeper, Robert R. R., Editors, *Learning and Mental Health in the School*, p. 70. ASCD, NEA: Washington, D.C., 1966.