
7-1-1971

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Recommended Citation

Hagberg, B. L. (1971). Uniting Efforts in Effective Reading Remediation. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 11 (4). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol11/iss4/2

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UNITING EFFORTS IN EFFECTIVE READING REMEDIATION

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Nearly every classroom contains some children who have not responded well to a developmental reading program and need remedial help from the reading specialist. These students have not achieved up to their full potential for a variety of reasons, and unless they receive remedial instruction the gap between achievement and potential will grow wider. The reading therapist is faced with the primary responsibility of providing the student's remedial work. However, it is not his task alone as the classroom teacher shares in this obligation. The child spends most of his time in the regular classroom and only a few short sessions with the reading specialist each week. Therefore, it is important and necessary that the classroom teacher and the reading therapist should cooperatively plan the student's program for remedial work.

Selecting Students for Remedial Help

Initially, they must set up criteria for selection of pupils for the remedial program. This criteria will usually vary from school to school depending upon the number of students needing help and the number of reading specialists available. Usually the number of children who may be referred in each school must be held to a minimum due to the lack of needed reading personnel. Therefore, the classroom teacher must refer disabled readers for remediation with discreet selection.

Reading disabilities can be divided into three levels according to the degree of seriousness. There are students who are severely disabled in reading and who show evidence that physical, psychological, sociological, or educational factors may be operating to hinder them from achieving at an expected potential. These more severe cases usually need clinical diagnosis and treatment.

The second level of disability is somewhat less severe. Students in this category are also functioning well below their capacity but do not show physical or marked psychological and sociological causal factors. They lack or show weakness in specific reading skills which require more time and more individual attention than a classroom teacher can afford. It is for these students that the wise teacher will

seek the help of the reading therapist, who has additional training in the remediation of reading difficulties.

The third level of reading disability is considered mild. These students lack understanding of certain reading skills and do not use them effectively. Children with such minor disabilities can be given corrective instruction by the classroom teacher in the regular classroom setting. Through keen observation and well planned instruction, the teacher is able to diagnose and correct these minor reading weaknesses as he carries on his daily instruction. Children who have a mild reading disability can be brought up to their reading potential in a short time and should be given immediate consideration in the classroom. They need not be referred to the remedial reading teacher.

Other basic considerations also need to be kept in mind when selecting children for reading remediation. A question teachers might ask themselves when making referrals could be: Is the prognosis for improvement in reading favorable for this child? Students who need the most help and who the teacher feels will respond well to remediation should be referred. Children with average or above average mental ability would probably profit most by remedial help. This is a decision which must be made when starting a school's reading program.

It is easier to help students with reading disabilities when they are identified early. When a student develops a discrepancy of one or two years between his reading achievement and apparent potential, it is advisable to seek remedial help for him. If a child does well in one or two other subjects but is significantly disabled in reading, there is good reason to believe he can achieve in reading also. The student's general attitude toward his disability and the remedial reading class is also very important. Unless he has a positive attitude toward the remedial class, it would probably be of little value for him. The teachers involved and the parents can do much to influence, in a positive way, the child's attitude toward the program. In setting up a remedial reading program, it is important to decide in advance the criteria for admitting students. It should be based on realistic standards pertinent to the particular situation in that school and commonly agreed upon by all teachers involved.

Planning the Program of Instruction

After a student has been selected for the remedial reading class, the reading therapist has the primary responsibility for planning his program with the assistance of the classroom teacher. They can confer and plan the student's instructional program together. A student spends the greater amount of his time in the classroom and usually

thirty minutes twice or three times a week with the reading therapist in an intensive individualized instructional period. Because of this, careful provisions need to be made in the classroom for the reinforcement and continuation of the remedial teaching initiated by the therapist. The reading specialist, likewise, can get cues from the classroom. At this time the combined efforts of the two teachers become very important as they work together in determining the instructional procedures, devising techniques, and selecting materials to help this student.

It is necessary to recognize any possible obstacles which might be preventing the student from achieving success in reading. Although all the causal factors, past and present, are to be considered when assessing a disabled reader, attention at this time will be given primarily to the conditions that are now existing with the child. The classroom teacher and reading specialist are attempting to devise a therapeutic instructional program to remediate a child's reading disability. Therefore, they would be more concerned over a present visual loss, for example, than they would over a temporary visual loss of a few years ago. Close observations and checks should also be made in regards to hearing, general health, and other physical factors as they are basic to the total instruction of children. If the physical defect cannot be treated or cured, instruction must be planned around it. Psychological obstacles, such as emotional adjustment and personality factors, can be the cause or the effect of reading disability and are often the most difficult to treat. Reading failure adds to emotional stress and the emotional frustrations handicap further improvement in reading. Therefore, the teachers involved must be patient and work cooperatively to establish reasonable goals and expectations in reading for these students.

Information concerning a child's reading problem can also be gained through knowledge of the home environment. The lack of reading materials in the home, stories having seldom been read to the child, very few learning experiences, the lack of verbal communication in the home, and unrealistic expectations of a child are a few of the common contributing factors which come to school with the child. They must be considered when planning the way of instruction for a disabled reader. It is wise to involve and interest the parent in the child's reading program. In this way they will be more able to see the vital role they play in their child's progress in reading.

Up to this point it has been assumed, somewhat, that the primary current causes were outside the school. However, educational factors

could also be contributing to the reading disabilities of children. The classroom and reading teachers need to consider these seriously when planning a student's reading remediation. If a child has been promoted by age rather than achievement without an accompanying change in his curriculum, then an immediate accommodation must be made. Various levels of difficulty of materials must be used at each grade level for children who are functioning at varying levels of reading ability. The reading teacher, at this point, can assess the child's instructional level through the use of an informal reading inventory. Together, the classroom teacher and reading therapist can choose instructional materials at that particular level. The child will then be able to meet the challenge of reading tasks and experience some success which will in turn motivate him to continue to reach and grow in his reading. If a child continues to be instructed at his frustration level as he continues through school, he may result in a seriously disabled reader.

Implementing the Program of Instruction

The teachers can also work cooperatively in choosing appropriate and adequate materials for a child's specific instruction. The two teachers must select books and other materials with the interests and abilities of the student in mind. The classroom teacher's materials and reading texts must be different from any in which the child has previously experienced failure. The reading teacher, at the same time, should choose materials different from those which were selected for the child in the classroom. The therapist must also provide a great variety of reading material which will meet the child's needs in both reading skills and interests. Since he provides highly individualized instruction he can effectively use interesting library books to correct or develop specific reading skills. At the same time he is building positive attitudes and appreciation for pleasurable reading.

The classroom teacher and reading therapist need the librarian's expertise and assistance in selecting the right materials and books for students. It is important to involve the librarian as they plan for an individual child's remedial reading instruction. The classroom teacher is often faced with a number of science, mathematics, and social studies texts which are written at one particular grade level. At the same time he has students who are unable to handle the vocabulary and comprehension skills at the level of difficulty, so it is necessary to have a number and variety of supplementary books accessible. These curriculum enrichment materials should be selected at various reading levels. This would enable all students to read about special

topics covered in the basic textbook. With the librarian's assistance and suggestions, the classroom teacher will then be able to guide individual students into books and materials at their particular instructional level. It is essential that students read at their instructional levels in the content areas as well as in the traditional "reading class" where the basic developmental reading skills are presented at varying levels.

As the classroom teacher works with a remedial reading student, certain skill weaknesses will be observed. He can, in turn, relate this child's need to the reading teacher. Specific instruction in that particular skill could then be given by the reading teacher and practice and reinforcement of this skill should take place in both the classroom and the special reading session. The reading therapist also gives extra attention to the student's recreational reading by being alert to a child's interests and keeping informed of the activities going on within the classroom. Likewise, the reading teacher will suggest techniques and skills to be reinforced in the classroom as well as helpful materials which could be effectively used with the students.

Reporting to Parents

Finally, they must both be cooperatively involved with the home as the student's total reading instruction is explained to the parents. The classroom teacher must talk with the parents about all aspects of the child's school life, from reading, mathematics, art, and music, to playground behavior and school bus schedules. Therefore, he is limited in the amount of time he can spend explaining the child's reading program. He might explain the school's total reading program, how he teaches reading in the classroom, how their child fits into the plan, and why he selected their child for special reading instruction. It is very important that the reading therapist also hold a conference with the parents. He can give reinforcement to the classroom plan of instruction while he explains the specific reading remediation being provided for their child. Suggestions could also be made to the parents on how they might promote good reading habits at home. Conferences encourage the parents to an understanding of both the program and the child's reading problem.

An example of teachers cooperative efforts is that of Mr. Sharpe, a fourth grade teacher, and Miss Knowes, the reading therapist. Together, they planned an effective reading program for Ron, a ten and one half year old boy. Mr. Sharpe observed that in most class discussions Ron could express himself very well. In certain class

activities he was eager to participate while in others he would not be at all interested. His teacher observed that Ron would tend to withdraw from activities involving any amount of reading. He was also tense and hesitant in oral reading situations. As Mr. Sharpe looked over Ron's cumulative record he noted that the boy's latest test scores showed reading, 2.5; arithmetic computation, 5.2; and a group test score showed an IQ of 102. Considering all factors, he felt that Ron had good potential for learning to read better and referred him to Miss Knowes. She studied the various sections of Ron's latest achievement tests. He had done well on comprehension of simple items but had not gone far in the test due to slow speed. She administered a word recognition test and found this was his area of difficulty. It was noted that he relied heavily upon phonics and sounded the words letter by letter. He did not visually analyze words as a whole and failed to use meaningful clues in recognizing unknown words. Miss Knowes also found his instructional level to be at the third grade level rather than the fourth grade and his independent reading level was at second grade, as determined by an informal reading inventory. Ron appeared to have no visual or auditory difficulties.

The two teachers worked together in planning Ron's reading instruction. Mr. Sharpe returned to third grade material in providing Ron's basic reading instruction. He provided the librarian with a list of the topics and areas which the class would be covering in science and social studies and asked her to secure books on these topics, written at the third grade level. The assistance of the librarian was also requested in acquainting Ron and other children with library books for recreational reading at their independent reading levels.

Ron's parents were very concerned over his reading problem. His mother worked with him every evening helping him sound out words. The teachers suggested that he read from an easier book and that Ron's mother immediately supply unknown words. Later they could just discuss what he had read. She accepted the teacher's suggestions and the word attack skills were left to his teachers.

Ron was given remedial work in Miss Knowes reading room for one half hour each day. She provided specific instruction for employing larger elements of words. Visual analysis as well as structural analysis of words and context clues were emphasized. Phrasing techniques and short articles were used for rapid reading. Reading for pleasure was especially encouraged. Mr. Sharpe followed some of these same suggestions for Ron in the classroom and also provided

practice exercises to reinforce the needed skills. At the end of six months of instruction in the reading room with adjustments to his level of reading made in the regular classroom, Ron's reading ability had shown a considerable gain. Although he was still mildly disabled in reading, Ron had overcome much of his basic difficulty. He was released from the reading room as it was felt Mr. Sharpe could give him the additional instruction needed within the classroom.

Conclusion

Communication and cooperation between the classroom teacher and reading specialist are absolutely essential if children's reading disabilities are to be corrected. The reading therapist may provide careful instruction to remediate specific reading disabilities for a child only to have him return to the classroom and be faced with reading materials at his frustration level. The remedial reading instruction in this situation was done in isolation and will be of little or no value towards alleviating the student's reading problem. Likewise, a classroom teacher might carefully plan the child's classroom reading instruction making sure all reading activities and materials are chosen at the pupil's instructional reading level only to have him go to a reading teacher who has him work through some reading workbook in lock-step procedure. The reading specialist must be precise and plan a student's remedial work around his specific skill needs. Reading games and skill drill sheets assigned without regard to the student's particular disability will do little or nothing to remediate his difficulty.

The wise teachers will want to involve the parents for they can be of real value when they understand how the teachers are attempting to help their child. As they confer with the teachers, parents are often able to perceive their vital role in helping with their child's reading problem.

Unless the classroom and reading teachers plan a complete, consistent, and cooperative program of instruction, disabled readers will be seriously defeated in overcoming reading disabilities. The ultimate goal is not only to develop and correct reading skills, but to produce an ever reading student who finds reading to be both interesting and fun!

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