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ANOTHER HAT FOR THE SPECIAL READING TEACHER

Lucille Larzelere

The special reading teacher functions most successfully if he is one who can wear many different hats. He may be required to wear more than one at a time or to change them rather quickly with the ease of a magician. He is versatile and flexible in this accomplishment. However, there is one hat in particular to which we would like to give attention in this article. It is a hat that is deserving particular attention because it is a year around necessity and should be worn in any season. It is indispensable to the reading teacher who works with retarded readers. The purpose of this article will be to describe the hat and to suggest that it would be more serviceable if it were more adequately designed and constructed.

How Many Hats Does the Reading Teacher Wear?

Perhaps we should first take a look at the hat wardrobe of the average reading teacher. We know that one of the first hats which he acquires is the rather common type which usually accompanies the A.B. or B.S. degree. It is the elementary or secondary teaching certificate which is recognized as a basic. Then there is the little model which is obtained when the teacher adds the understanding and knowledge which qualify him as a special reading teacher. He soon learns, however, that to function with real effectiveness, he will need to change his headsize just enough to be able to fit into the public relations cap. This one is particularly appropriate and useful when introducing reading programs into new schools or when meeting with teachers, principals, or parents. Mention should be made of some of the other hats which the reading teacher will find necessary to don from time to time and for which he will want to allow room on his hat shelf. These might include the part-time administrator number, or the less interesting one designed for clerical work, or the one styled for graduate students. The teacher often finds it difficult to obtain the last mentioned one and the fit is frequently poor because of limited procurement time or unavoidable distractions.

What Is the Special Hat?

There are others, but it is time now to examine the one hat which deserves the special attention previously described. It is acknowledged

that the wearing of the several hats is not an easy task and because there is concern to wear them properly, the significance of the one hat can be sadly minimized. The hat to which we refer is that of counselor. There are those who will immediately say that the reading teacher is not a counselor or that we have counselors to wear the counselors' hats. This is true, but we cannot overlook the fact that the special reading teacher finds himself in a position to be most effective wearing this hat and is always called upon to do so whether ready or not. Just as the teaching of the reading process cannot be isolated from the psychological and emotional condition of an individual, so reading therapy cannot ignore the need for skillful treatment of these aspects of the case.

Why Is the Reading Teacher Able To Wear This Hat Effectively?

There are several reasons why the special reading teacher is in a most favorable position to counsel his students. Because of the very nature of his work, he has a close personal interest in the student. He has seen the student operate in a group. He has worked with him individually. He has established a relationship of mutual respect and trust. He is himself a person who is understanding and acceptant. He likes young people. He has a warm friendly personality and good self-understanding. These are qualities which, hopefully, the counselor and the reading teacher will both possess. Therefore, it can be a great advantage when the reading instructor and the counselor are the same person. It almost becomes imperative that the reading teacher wears the counselor's hat beneath the others.

Can there be any question as to the need for counseling the retarded reader? Here is a person whose self-image and feelings of personal worth usually fall within the lowest percentiles on a personality test. He needs help to like, accept, and respect himself. Because he has an unlovely view of himself, he views others negatively. All of this must be considered in the remedial process.

Two other closely related questions may be asked: Can the reading teacher counsel?, followed by, Should the reading teacher counsel? We believe that the answer to both questions is, Yes, if— In other words, the reading teacher can and should counsel if he has received some training in counseling during his preparation as a reading teacher. He should counsel if he recognizes that he is limited just as any counselor is limited. There are some problems which, when properly handled by the counselor or the reading teacher, are referred to other persons having special training and skills. But what of the

people who seem to naturally possess the qualities of personality and the understanding required of a good counselor? It is true that there are these people just as there are those who given any amount of training will never be able to counsel competently. The latter should probably be neither a reading teacher nor a counselor but the former will be able to perform even more successfully with training and with knowledge of the philosophy, methods and techniques of counseling which have proven to be most effective.

It may be concluded that no matter how knowledgeable a reading teacher may be about reading, he is not really accomplished unless he knows how to meet the student who needs to express aggression, hostility, fears of inferiority, self-doubt, anxiety, or other intense feelings which often accompany reading retardation. Many will feel that we already expect the reading teacher to be versatile and skilled in the wearing of his many hats and now we are asking for something more. However, it is fairly apparent that he can't and shouldn't avoid putting on the counselor's hat. It is equally apparent that further thought should be given to finding ways to prepare and assist the teacher so that he may wear this very important hat more comfortably and effectively.