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THE EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL READING PROGRAM

Marilyn Nederveld

An effective remedial reading program is one that is directed by a highly trained remedial instructor and has gained the cooperation and support of teachers, administrators, and parents. The effectiveness of such a program is achieved only by long range planning in which everyone involved is made cognizant of the aims and objectives of the program.

A remedial reading program is developed when a need for it exists. Teachers may experience a need for a special reading program as a result of meeting with failure in instructing certain students by conventional methods. Administrators may feel a need for a remedial reading program after studying comprehensive plans to improve classroom instruction in reading. Encountering the demands of a technological age, the public may express a desire for such a program. Nevertheless, once the need is established, the good school system takes immediate action.

Initial Planning of the Program

Planning may begin by securing a reading teacher who is well equipped in three areas of the remedial program. That is, a teacher who knows how reading can best be taught to all children with provision for the slow progress cases; one who is trained in clinical work to the point where she can study with success all but the most extreme cases of reading difficulty; and one who is qualified and experienced in teaching poor readers so that she can do this work or show others how to do it. A person so trained fits into the plans of any particular system and is of value in all these different ways.

Because of the specialized training and experience of the reading teacher, she is often asked to organize the entire remedial reading program, or at least most of it. While accepting the responsibility, she nonetheless consults the administrator in her planning. She feels it is important not only that the administrator be made aware of all aspects of the program, but also that he support it and be willing to cooperate in interpreting its aims and objectives to others.

The Development of the Program

The actual organization of the remedial reading program involves

the consideration of many factors. The remedial teacher must determine the goals of the program, the criteria for selecting students, the methods and materials she will use, the method she will employ in introducing the program to the faculty, and the manner in which she will assign the students to the program.

The Criteria for Selecting Students

The first thing the remedial reading teacher does is to establish the criteria for selecting the students for the program. In her mind arise three types of students that might qualify for instruction. The first type is a student whose reading achievement is below his grade placement and below his chronological age, but at his mental age. The second type is a student whose reading achievement is below his reading potential but at grade level. The third type is a student whose reading achievement is below his grade placement, his chronological age, and his mental age. Which type of student would benefit most from remedial instruction? The first type of student, although not achieving up to grade level or chronological age, is already working up to his capacity. He would not gain enough to merit individual help in the remedial situation. The second type of student, although not working up to his potential, is working at grade level. He does not pose a problem as such in the homeroom. The classroom teacher, with the benefit of inservice training, could do much to assist him. The third type of student is reading below his grade placement, his chronological age, and *his mental age*. He is not benefitting by conventional methods of classroom instruction and yet has the capacity to achieve. Certainly, this type of student would gain most from her remedial instruction. He would be given first consideration.

Methods and Materials

Obviously, the methodology the remedial reading teacher uses will be essentially different from that of other reading instruction. A remedial reader is a retarded reader, and he must learn skills faster than he would in a regular classroom. If he is to learn faster, the teacher must be completely familiar with successive stages of reading skill, in contrast to many classroom teachers who concentrate instruction more narrowly, even with heterogeneous groups. Thus she must drive directly and rapidly for the development of the reading skills which are normally the outgrowth of a more leisurely paced classroom program. In addition to this, she will seek to adapt her instruction to the interests and the goals of the individual student.

Much of her effort may be devoted toward building success for students who have repeatedly experienced failure by conventional classroom methods.

The materials she will utilize in instruction will also be of a different nature than those utilized in the comprehensive classroom. Books must be available which are low in reading difficulty and more advanced in interest appeal. Many book companies are now publishing materials which are either original stories with the factors which contribute to reading instruction controlled, or are rewritten, simplified versions of well-known stories. Desiring to stimulate curiosity and to create success, the remedial teacher will select a wealth of materials on a variety of ability levels and interesting topics.

The Creation of a Desirable Climate

The remedial teacher is concerned with creating a desirable climate in which the program can begin. While it is necessary to inform the teachers of the specific goals and objectives of the program, it is also important to establish good relations with them. The remedial teacher might strive to accomplish this through a meeting, designed to introduce the program to the faculty. At the meeting, the remedial teacher herself, or perhaps a visiting consultant in reading, would acquaint the faculty with the goals of a remedial program, the criteria by which students are selected, the methods and materials utilized in the program. Teachers would also be familiarized with their duties with respect to the program. Following this, a get-acquainted period, of perhaps a week or two would begin. During this time, the remedial reading teacher would initiate an attitude of friendliness and cooperation. She would strive to be truly sympathetic with the difficulties that teachers experience. If she made suggestions, she would be certain they were highly practical and welcomed by those to whom given. Hopefully, channels of communication would be established as a result of this get-acquainted period.

The Assignment of Students to the Program

The assignment of students to remedial instruction is the remedial teacher's next concern. After receiving a recommended list of students from the classroom teachers, the remedial teacher will begin interviewing, testing, and compiling data to help her determine who would benefit most by remedial instruction. Many factors will be considered. The student's physical, mental, emotional, and social maturity will be appraised. After careful evaluation, the remedial teacher will

notify the classroom teacher of the students who have been accepted into the program.

Scheduling the students will involve trying to assign them to times which will not cause them to miss too much basic instruction in the homeroom. The remedial teacher may discuss the scheduling problem with the pupil's classroom teacher who may be able to make some program adjustments for the child's convenience.

The Inception of the Program

Diagnosis of the Students

After the inception of the program, the remedial teacher makes a more detailed diagnosis of the pupil's reading disabilities and a much more elaborate inquiry into possible causative factors. She has additional need for information since the pupils are strangers to her.

The complexity of the diagnostic procedure she uses will, of course, depend upon the facilities that are available to her. To help herself become better acquainted with the student, she might use an interest inventory. She would obtain a knowledge of the student's reading ability through an informal reading inventory and by reading achievement test scores. She will perhaps administer an individual intelligence test to find the student's mental age. In addition to this, tests to evaluate physical coordination, dominance, vision, and hearing may be given. The teacher supplements these findings by obtaining information from the classroom teacher and from the parents. All of this information she then records and keeps for each student in an ordinary file folder. As time goes on, she adds to this file a record of all progress that is made during the instructional period and comments about the student's mental, physical and emotional growth. In this way, the remedial teacher is provided with a valuable guide for remedial teaching.

Instruction of the Students

Certainly the remedial teacher's time must not be "spread thin" if results are to be clearly perceptible. In the beginning she may desire to work in the most serious spots, selecting students who exhibit the greatest need for instruction. By meeting these students every day, she will be able to arouse enthusiasm and to observe the progress made. Depending on the type of training needed, the number of students meeting in a group might vary from two to five. Extreme cases may need to be seen individually. As the program progresses, she will strive to extend her services to a greater number of individuals.

Consultation with Teachers, Parents, and Administrators

In addition to the time the remedial teacher spends instructing students, time must be available for consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators. Certainly if a program is to relate realistically and logically to classroom instruction, consultation with teachers is a necessity. Endeavoring to develop this important relationship, the remedial teacher conducts small group meetings in which she makes suggestions of methods and materials for helping and preventing reading difficulties too numerous for the program to handle. She demonstrates various reading instructional techniques. She assists teachers in making classroom adjustments for students who are receiving remedial training. Also, she takes time to interview parents, helping them to come to a better understanding of their child, and confers with her principal or supervisor concerning many aspects of the program.

Preparation of Materials

The remedial teacher has part of her time unscheduled for the discovery and preparation of materials both for herself and for other teachers. She considers this a major facet of the remedial program. Much effort and time is required both to explore and evaluate the many new materials constantly being developed in the field of reading.

Responsibilities of Teachers, Parents, Administrators

The remedial teacher is the most important part of the remedial program. The success of the program rests a great deal upon her ability to keep communication channels open and to engender enthusiasm for the program. She must not only prove her capacity for dealing with all phases of the program but must also convey to others that her first purpose is to give service. However, teachers, parents, and administrators can also affect the success of the program. The classroom teacher largely determines the student's initial attitude toward the program. She can inspire enthusiasm in it by expressing confidence in its ability to help them. She can cooperate by observing the scheduled times a student must attend the remedial classes. She can follow up any suggestions given by the remedial teacher. Finally, she can express appreciation for any progress made, realizing that what seems a little improvement for some children represents a real victory.

Parents, by understanding that the cost of such a program is more than paid for by a decrease of retardation in the school system, can

lend their encouragement and support. By accepting that the purpose of the program is to help children who badly need it, they can refrain from making unrealistic demands.

Administrators can cooperate by asking that all requests for services be made through them, thus releasing the remedial teacher for tasks that merit her training and experience to a greater degree. He can also strive to keep abreast of all planning and activity involved in the program and in this way interpret more effectively the overall purpose of the program to the faculty, the school board, and general public.

An effective remedial reading program then is the result of many factors. But perhaps most important, it is one which is capably directed by a teacher who has the benefit of specialized training and one which has gained the interest, support, and cooperation of teachers, parents, and administrators.

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