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William L. Holladay

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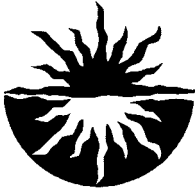
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# HORIZONS OF READING EDUCATION:

## Self-image and the Disabled Reader

*William L. Holladay*



Every teacher, whether a reading teacher or a content area teacher, has had the problem of teaching disabled readers and has found to his dismay that not only must a learning disability be confronted, but that often a major portion of this learning disability involves the student's self-image or emotional self-concept. Frustration results for both the teacher and student. There seem to be no magic formulae for treatment of this problem, but many teachers are finding some very creative solutions. Ms. Shirley Madsen, a reading teacher in Helena, Montana is one such teacher.

While teaching at Mountain View School, a girl's correctional institution in Helena, Ms. Madsen conducted an experiment in "cross-grade" or "cross-level" tutoring. A strong believer in the theory that poor self-image or concept interferes with treatment of the disabled reader, Ms. Madsen's goals were to improve reading skills and concurrently build self-concepts. Evaluative tests were administered to determine reading level. Disabled readers in the 7th and 10th grade range became the "instructors" for other remedial students in the 4th to 6th grade range, to be termed "clients." Additional positive reinforcement was provided by a payroll system, business contracts and an atmosphere of professionalism. While guidelines were presented and specific goals established, the student participants were strongly guided to view the program as their own through democratic decision making and assumption of responsibility.

Among the materials used were the SRA Kit 111b, SRA RFU Kit, SRA Vocabulab and the Macmillan Spectrum. One hour sessions were held twice weekly. As a learning tool, instructors were encouraged to plan their own lessons, teach themselves how to use the various kits and materials, and keep records of each session. Clients, in turn, were responsible for their own workbooks and for gauging their own progress through the kits.

The Nelson Reading Test and the Nelson-Denny Reading Test were used as entrance exams with The Davis Reading Test, the Wide

Range Vocabulary Test, as well as different forms of the former tests as comparative concluding tests. These yielded mixed data on student gains during the experiment. Eleven of the 13 students who completed the program showed gains on at least one of the tests. Ms. Madsen notes dissatisfaction with the testing instruments as they reflect a white middle class cultural bias and are perhaps deceptive when used for evaluating institutionalized children.

The students' own evaluations were more important, however, than any set of standardized test results could have been. "To be independent, to help someone else, to be responsible, to improve my reading, and to learn how to work with people" were all highly significant comments made by participants. The fact that all participants *thought* their reading had improved and that they frequently spent their earnings on books points toward the assumption that the experiment was highly successful in combating poor self-concept and self-defeating attitudes in the disabled reader.

Ms. Madsen, now teaching at Helena Junior High School, continues to fight the poor self-image in her disabled readers as she sees this as the most important factor at the secondary level. Besides "cross-grade" tutoring, she feels that showing sincere and deep interest in each student's achievements and needs, likes and dislikes is especially important. Every chance for praise and reward is utilized, creating comfortable reading areas, individualizing instructional programs for success, using high interest materials, and advertising in all possible ways the student's good points are all effective methods of confronting the disabling poor self-image of the student with a reading problem.