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REMEDICATION FOR THE POOR COLLEGE READER: PROBABILITIES OF SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a most complex form of behavior, yet it is basic to all academic tasks. One must be able to successfully interpret the meaning of words to function in the academic environment. Unfortunately, there are thousands of freshmen annually entering our institutions of higher learning without the reading skills needed to complete college level work. This problem is most acute in two-year colleges with a student population that is relatively disadvantaged compared to students in four-year colleges. Two-year colleges have more high-risk students in terms of their chances to complete degree aspirations than do four-year colleges and universities.

Research conducted with high-risk college students to develop reading skills has been successful. High-risk students can overcome educational handicaps with the help of professional remedial specialists. This article will discuss some of the unique problems within higher education that are present as a result of an open door policy for students. The open door policy has resulted in more high-risk students in higher education, particularly the two-year colleges. The specific development includes a discussion of the entering college population, research on remediation programs, strategies for helping the student and a brief summary.

Who Gets Into College And Why?

Higher Education in the United States attempts to provide opportunities for the masses rather than for a closed elite group. Cross's (1968) notion of access and accommodation illustrates in a general way the major philosophies of higher education in regard to their clients. *Access* represents the institution's willingness to accept the student, but the student must conform or adjust to the institution. *Accommodation* represents an attempt on the part of the institution to adjust to the student. The rapid development of two-year institutions of higher learning within the past 15 years represents an effort to accommodate all types of students.

Research with academic indicators suggests that students entering four-year colleges tend to cluster in the top third whereas noncollege youth score in the lowest third. The junior college group has substantial numbers at all three levels (Cross, 1968). Thornton (1966) said the average academic ability of two-year college students is lower than that of four-year college

students. Most two-year colleges welcome students who represent various levels of tested academic aptitude and all segments of the socio-economic life of their communities.

Generally two-year students are likely to come from families with lower educational attainment and income resources than university or four-year college students. Two-year students do not consider themselves as well prepared for college as do students in four-year colleges and universities; moreover, they have less confidence in, and are frequently critical of, their high school courses and teachers (Cohen, 1971). Measures of intellectual orientation clearly differentiate among high school graduates who enroll in two-year colleges and those who attend four year colleges. Students attending two-year institutions are lower on measures of intellectual orientation when compared to students attending four-year institutions (Trend & Medsker, 1968). On measures of autonomy and non-authoritarianism, variables frequently associated with intellectual disposition, several investigators have found lower scores for two-year students and less flexibility in thinking than in four-year college and university populations (Warren, 1966).

The open door policy attempts not to discriminate on the basis of academic factors as well as non-academic factors (age, sex, race, ethnic background, socio-economic factors). If one accepts Burton R. Clarke's (1972) thesis that college effects occur primarily not at the level of attitude and values but in the allocation of statuses and roles, then it becomes necessary to open the door to all. Meyer (1972) expands on this point by stating it makes no difference whether a college graduate has learned anything. The fact is a graduate's job prospects, income potential, access to political and civil service positions, marital prospects, and other opportunities are greatly altered. Yet, by opening the doors to all, regardless of ability, problems are created. The primary problem is accepting responsibility for the welfare of the high-risk student.

Who are the high-risk students that enter our institutions of higher learning? Most likely they come from culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, meaning low in the socio-economic status of society. Charles H. Anderson (1971) said cultural traits of the poor reappear time and again throughout the literature on poverty: social isolation, low self-image, limited aspirations, inability to communicate, implusiveness, existence-oriented rather than improvement-oriented, fear, resignation, fatalism and inability to understand bureaucratic behavior. The inability to communicate is definitely a handicap in the academic world. Malcolm Douglass (1967) said those whose speaking and listening capacities are poorly developed will be hampered in reading print and writing. Havighurst (1970) said about half the disadvantaged children in this country or fifteen percent of the total child population are severely retarded in educational achievement.

A poor reader in college more than likely will bring with him or her traits that compound the reading problem. Spache's (1964) research indicates poor readers have low scores on attitudes toward school and may be

emotionally disturbed regarding their reading abilities. Bannatyne (1971) notes a strong association between poor reading attainment and antisocial disorder but little association between reading attainment and neurosis. Feldman and Graff (1968) found that environmental deficiencies leading to cumulative experiences of frustration in early schooling constitute serious problems for academic achievement. A profile of the disabled reader in public school indicates he or she will be undernourished, tired, have a brief attention span, display vague concepts of time and space and test average or below average on standardized I.Q. tests (Feldman and Graff, 1968). If they make it to college, more than likely they will still have a similar profile.

Research on open admissions clearly indicates that more students from lower socio-economic levels are attending college. Harold W. Bernard (1972) observed that research clearly indicates school grades follow class lines, with a disproportionate number of high grades going to middle-class students (especially upper-middle) and a disproportionate number of the low grades going to the lower class students.

Another characteristic of the underachiever is a stubborn, yet perfectly sincere, overevaluation of the level of their work (Pitcher and Blauschild, 1970). This imposes another complication for the institutions of higher learning to overcome in terms of upgrading the skill levels of poor readers. Both the underachieving wealthy and deprived student have the same inability to plan long-range goals (Pitcher and Blauschild, 1970). Both groups of underachievers show reading problems in the academic sense and have the same ups and downs in academic performance. Quite often the underachiever is involved and preoccupied with the activities of their own pocket-cultures and uninterested in the values and goals of society.

Perhaps the most difficult element to measure in terms of students characteristics is motivation. Bannatyne (1971) said the study of motivation comprises one of the most controversial sections of psychology. The motivational level of high-risk students presents another problem in overcoming reading deficiencies. White (1959) commented on some studies which indicate that breadth of learning is favored by moderate and hampered by strong motivation. There are numerous theories concerning motivation, yet there is no predictable test of this human characteristic. It is ironic that so much is said concerning motivation and educational achievement, but so little is known about who has it or does not have it. An analogy can be drawn from the Supreme Court judge who was asked what pornography was and replied that he could not explain it, but he knew it when he saw it. To ascertain achievement in terms of measurable data one must probe the research on remediation programs.

Research On Remediation Programs and Survival

Gray (1967) reported that psychology departments were the first to establish reading clinics in the academic environment. Between 1956 and 1967 there was a trend toward unrestricted enrollment and increased reading clinics. Teaching specific reading skills and the use of commercially

prepared systems are the primary approaches adopted for remediation of college students (Gray, 1967). Goodwin's (1971) research indicates the four standardized tests most often selected by junior college reading instructors are the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Iowa Silent Reading Test, California Reading Test, and the Co-operative Reading Test. Eighty-five percent of the junior colleges use standardized reading tests for diagnostic purposes.

There are more high-risk students in two-year colleges than in four-year colleges, yet there are many junior colleges without sufficient remedial facilities. California junior colleges indicate that 80 percent of the entering freshmen are enrolled in remedial English (Bassone, 1966). Crawford and Milligan (1968) point out that while nearly all four-year colleges have established reading and study skills programs, very few two-year colleges have instituted such programs. Dubois and Evans (1972) claim that most college remedial programs are limited in scope, and not much effort is made toward salvaging the low achiever. Certainly more effort in remediation on the part of the two-year systems would aid in retaining potential scholars.

One could project back to the high school environment on this point also. Dechant (1965) said 50 per cent or less of high schools have reading programs and most of these are feebly developed, usually voluntary without strong administrative support. Three stumbling blocks to the improved reading programs in high school according to Dechant (1965) are: (1) no established adequate comprehensive program; (2) inadequate budget; (3) scarcity of qualified reading personnel. One may suppose that these items may also be stumbling blocks for the junior college reading programs.

Research on reading and success in college is plentiful. Artley, et al., (1973) found the single most important reading skill related to success in the first year of college was comprehension (relation based on GPA and reading comprehension scores). Yuthas (1971) found remedial reading programs were significantly related to persistence in college and resistance to extraneous influences which might lead to withdrawal. As for the disadvantaged minority students, Shaffer (1973) reported that the factors which contribute most toward successful achievement in college are: (1) scholastic aptitude, particularly verbal ability; (2) positive attitudes and techniques for studying; (3) acceptance of their educational goals and professors; (4) an orientation toward and motivation for academic pursuits. Patricia M. Hodges (1972) has an interesting study on non-cognitive predictors as alternatives in college admission for the culturally different (not necessarily the disadvantaged). Hodges found non-cognitive predictors such as strength and conservativeness of parental religious viewpoints as the best predictor.

Maxwell (1963) found that low achieving students who were academically successful were typically those with higher initial skills and tended to show greater improvement in more areas than the unsuccessful. Lee (1964) also reported that the greatest gains in rate of reading for both college and adult students is found among those with the higher initial skills. Adult students were found to make greater gains than typical college students.

To achieve, students need to be interested in college, have a good self-image regarding learning and attain a sense of control of the environment (Coleman, et al., 1966). For students entering college without these attributes, failure to persist is often the result. There is evidence that remediation courses can help students that are educationally handicapped. McDonald and Zimny (1963) found that comprehension and flexibility are the two primary ingredients of effective reading. Being taught how to study is believed to improve upon one's flexibility and comprehension.

There are many colleges that do not have adequate study skills/remediation courses, yet they recruit all types of students in terms of measured aptitude. Many administrators willingly accept students who are not prepared for college in order to maintain enrollment at a desirable level. The major problem is that many institutions of higher education are not dealing adequately with the academic problems their students bring with them. This is particularly true of institutions with an open door policy of admissions. Dubois and Evans (1972) have stated that most study skills/remedial programs in two-year institutions are limited in scope with little effort expended toward salvaging the low achiever. Cline (1972) said any community college today that maintains an "open door" admission policy and claims to be comprehensive, can ill afford to be without an effective reading and study skills program.

An admission process scientifically designed to prevent incoming students from enrolling in courses for which they are not prepared will strengthen both the curriculum and the instructional programs (Blocker, et al., 1965). Since the two-year institutions have students with less measured ability in terms of standardized aptitude scores, this population of students might benefit from strong remedial courses (American College Testing Program, 1969 and Flanagan, et al., 1964).

Strategy For Helping College Students With Reading Problems

William Glasser (1969) claims to have discovered an important fact regarding failure: regardless of how many failures a person has had in his past, regardless of his background, his culture, his color, or his economic level, he will not succeed in general until he can in some way first experience success in one important part of his life.

Arcieri and Margolis (1968) said the emotional and learning aspects of a reading disability must be handled at the same time, usually on a one-to-one approach. This means that the personality of the individual must be considered while attempting to accomplish learning tasks. Mary B. Lane (1972) claims that children often come to school eager to read and teachers make remedial readers out of them, because teachers make it difficult for a child in the first grade to maintain his self-respect. This same concept applies to college remedial readers. One should attempt to work with the student as an individual. Bloom (1968) believes that if every student had a very good tutor most of them would be able to learn a particular subject to a high degree and attain mastery, which would in turn help develop a life

long interest in learning. This life long learning process or self-motivation is a significant goal of higher education.

Arthur S. McDonald (1961) notes that multicausal factors and psychological functions underlie reading disability in high school and college students, because reading is a function of the whole personality and is one aspect of the growth of the individual. The ultimate goal of reading instruction must be the modification of the personal and social adjustment of the student, wherever such adjustment impedes reading ability.

There has been a trend away from indiscriminate use of mechanical aids and more emphasis on materials to fit individual needs (Berg, 1964). Ideally, the selection of materials and methods for a reading improvement program should be based on the needs of the individual. No single theory as yet has been able to explain all aspects of learning and certainly reading is considered to be learning (Kingsley, 1957). Bugelski (1956) said the learning psychologist (i.e., the teacher) is obligated to manipulate the factors of anxiety and reinforcement in such a way that positive results are obtained.

Research in successful reading programs have taken varied approaches. Schick (1968) said college students should perform analytical exercises such as understanding the author's purpose, principle thoughts, inferences and comprehension. After eight years of experimental programs at De Paul University it was concluded those reading programs which correlated significantly with college grades were those which emphasized major patterns of organizing and developing thinking in each content field (Douglass and Halfter, 1958). In other words the flexible reader was the most successful risk in college. Paulson and Stahmann (1973) think students who work at reading skills and study habits can acquire habits and skills on their own after an individual program has been established. In regard to the disadvantaged student, Astin, et. al. (1973) recommend introducing some system through which the total work load could be reduced and more time allotted than the traditional four years. Bloom (1968) also endorses this concept and furthermore states that aptitude is simply a factor of time. Given enough time anyone can master a skill or concept.

Miller and Stillwagon (1970) report success with a reading remediation program between high school and college. Group tests and inventories were administered (ACT, Edwards Personality Preference Schedule, Missouri College English Placement Test, Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Strong Interest Inventory and Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale). The group as a whole had a predicted GPA of 1.5 and achieved a 2.2 in summer and 2.0 in the fall. Yet, Miller and Stillwagon conclude that skills are not enough—students must accept responsibility for motivation, discipline and study. Programs aimed at salvaging the underachiever must be structured in such a way as to encourage and provide an opportunity for the students to help themselves.

Homer L. J. Carter (1967) listed eight principles based on 22 years of experience in reading programs at Western Michigan University:

- (1) The teacher must stimulate, inform, and guide.
- (2) Every student should know how well he reads and should select for himself the specific reading skills he needs to acquire.

- (3) The student should understand that he can improve his reading ability and that the responsibility for doing so rests with him.
- (4) Each student should be given an opportunity to set up his own objectives and to attain them at his own rate and in accordance with his own plan.
- (5) Attention should be given to physical, psychological and environmental factors which may be affecting reading.
- (6) The student should be taught to read effectively the texts required in his college work.
- (7) Instructions should be simple, direct, and specific.
- (8) The student should evaluate his own achievement at the beginning and at the end of the laboratory activity.

This list is simple and is generally supported by the research.

Perhaps the direct approach, one-on-one, is most rewarding in terms of individualizing the program, but it is also the most expensive. There will have to be a commitment of resources if sound reading programs are to be established for high-risk students.

Summary

Students entering the two-year colleges in the United States constitute over 30 percent of the total enrollment of all colleges and universities in the United States. These students are most likely to be the ones needing help in reading skills and study habits. In addition to the need for skills, emotional and personality problems must also be handled. The solution requires a highly skilled and experienced individual to teach reading. Without such individuals little success can be expected in helping the high-risk college student.

Administrators know who their students are in terms of chances of success and should take responsibility for their development or restrict their enrollment. Factors such as motivation and patience work in favor of the handicapped student, yet it is difficult to identify these factors.

Certainly no one expects the open door policy to be reversed. We need to expand upon the concept of the open door. An active, dynamic approach is required to help all students identified as high-risk.

There is evidence indicating the small college may best afford the high-risk student the opportunity to develop without the problem of transfer shock—going from the family/community environment to the large multiversity. One could hypothesize that high-risk students entering a reading/study habits program would significantly improve upon their predicted GPA. Several short term projects have been successful in this area. Perhaps more research needs to be accomplished to demonstrate the potential of a remedial reading program.

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