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Phyllis C. Butts

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THE SYSTEMATIC ORGANIZATION
OF A READING CURRICULUM FOR
SLOW LEARNERS AT KENNEDY MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

Phyllis C. Butts

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Sister Marie Colette
(Adviser)

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The necessity for providing adequate and appropriate kinds of educational experiences in reading for all children, and especially the slow learners, has been steadily becoming more and more urgent. In order to arrive at a solution, the problem must be understood and a method of attack planned that is realistic in terms of the facilities and personnel available. The solution often requires a complete rethinking of the reading curriculum.

A program teaching reading skills to slow learners should possess certain characteristics. It must reflect an expertise in the teaching of reading skills and the process of learning to read. It must be easy to use and yet efficient. It must be specific in the items to be taught, how they are to be taught, and how to determine exactly what learning has taken place. It should encourage and facilitate diagnosis and individualization of instruction. Lastly, it should be adaptable to many variables, such as modalities, methodology, materials and classroom structure. Such a program specifically adapted to the unique needs of slow learning children would seem an answer to teachers' growing concern. At Kennedy Middle School recent reading scores for slow learners taking the

Iowa Test of Basic Skills¹ showed a median of 5.91 for twenty-five eighth graders, 4.56 for thirty seventh graders, and 4.83 for thirty sixth graders. The need for a corrective reading program for slow learners would appear quite evident from these scores.

In proposing this curriculum for the slow learners at Kennedy Middle School, the criteria for the students involved must be clearly established. The students falling into this category should have I.Q.'s ranging from 80-90 and diagnosed reading difficulties. Careful observation of the slow learner shows a general intellectual slowness in all phases of development.² The interests of the slow learner will not be as wide or varied as the normal child's. While a slow learner has the same basic emotional needs and characteristics of all children, he has a great deal more difficulty making satisfactory adjustments to those needs because of his limited intelligence. Because of this difficulty in making adjustments, the slow learner becomes frustrated by his inability to succeed and tends to become aggressive in his attempts to compensate. This slow learner soon becomes known as a discipline problem. These pupils, with slower development, lower level of learning

¹Reading Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973).

²Orville G. Johnson, Education for the Slow Learners (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.: 1963), pp. 32-55.

ability, lower final potential intellectual level and restricted psycho-social stimulation in the majority of cases require a unique curriculum that takes these factors into consideration.¹

Evidence strongly indicates that where reading programs have been instituted specifically to meet their unique needs, most antisocial, deviant behavior is reduced materially or disappears entirely. When the frustration and futility of learning the cognitive skills required of normal children are reduced or removed, attitude and motivation are positively reinforced and learning begins to take place. It is the writer's belief that sequential learning will continue only in a systematic curriculum with well-defined procedures or controls. Such a program would provide that no necessary skills are omitted from mastery because of a haphazard approach to the areas of reading difficulty.

¹Ibid.

CHAPTER II
CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD READING PROGRAM FOR SLOW LEARNERS

Reading is a group of skills that extend in a hierarchy from the simple to the complex. The successful reader has mastered these skills in their proper sequence.¹ The slow learner who is unable to read has failed to acquire one or more of the skills of a successful reader. If these skills are continually neglected, he will never master the reading process. In order for a slow learner to acquire these skills, they must be presented in a logical order and with sufficient repetition and reinforcement for mastery of each step in the hierarchy.

Therefore, a sound corrective program requires (1) careful and thorough diagnosis, (2) clearly defined specific goals, (3) selected teaching materials, well-organized and readily available, (4) continuous diagnosis and restructuring of the corrective program to present and re-present the skills needed.²

Actually reading instruction for slow learners should not deviate from the principles of good, sound reading instruction on any level as the following six basic techniques illustrate.

1. Go to the child's present reading level.

¹Gerald G. Duffy and George B. Sherman, Systematic Reading Instruction (New York: Harper & Row: 1972), pp. 1-2.

²Ruth Gallant, Handbook in Corrective Reading: Basic Tasks (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.: 1970), p. 13.

2. Do not allow the child to experience failure.
3. Help the child build confidence.
4. Use a variety of approaches.
5. Base instruction on thorough diagnosis.
6. Build an interest in reading with supplementary materials.¹

With slow learners the progress may be slower and there will be more need for repetition and reteaching of skills.

Brueckner and Bond suggest various techniques for slow learners.

1. Since slow learners develop reading ability much more slowly than normal children, modifications should be in the form of changed emphasis rather than a drastically different program.
2. The materials used must be more carefully controlled so that the child is not frustrated by an extreme influx of new words.
3. More detailed and simplified explanations must be given.
4. Since he has trouble dealing with abstractions, more concrete illustrations are needed.
5. Specific goals should be short-range and easily achieved to avoid frustration.
6. The slow learner cannot achieve his purposes for reading without rereading. This does not usually bore him as each rereading gives fuller understanding to the selection. Ample time should be provided for rereading and oral reading.
7. Oral reading and oral prestudy are advisable with the slow learner. Many require vocalization in order to comprehend the material.²

¹Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading, Third Edition (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.; 1972), p. 555.

²Leo J. Brueckner and Guy L. Bond, The Diagnosis of Treatment of Learning Difficulties (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft: 1955), p. 237.

Perhaps the key to a good reading program for slow learners would then be a specialized structure. The skills, presented at a proper level in the proper sequence with enough time and repetition for mastery, should unlock the child's reading problems, provided they are presented by a teacher following sound techniques of reading instruction.

Causes of Reading Failure

The basic causes of reading disability fall into five areas; mental, physiological, emotional, environmental and educational factors. Robinson found that the most seriously retarded showed the greatest number of anomalies while those least retarded presented the fewest.¹ This leads to the one widely accepted conclusion that reading disabilities are the result of several contributing factors. This is especially true here as the writer is dealing specifically with the slow learners in the middle school where the reading difficulties have compounded themselves to rather serious disabilities of complex origin and solution.

Mental Factors

There is a high correlation between verbal intelligence and reading scores. This indicates that there is a need for basic intelligence to read. It does not necessarily mean that with intelligence reading just happens. There are persons with high I.Q.'s who have reading deficiencies.

¹Helen M. Robinson, Why Pupils Fail in Reading (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1946), p. 63.

The reverse is likewise true.¹ A child with below average I.Q. does not have to remain illiterate. He can extend his reading by expanding his basic reading skills and acquiring more in the proper sequence. It will take longer and it will have to be a much more concerted effort -- but it can be done. This is the premise of a good program for slow learners.

Physiological Causes

Vision

According to many studies, hyperopia, hyperopic astigmatism, biocular incoordination, visual fields, and aniseikonia are the visual difficulties most commonly related to reading. Teachers should be aware of their contributory effects and should advocate adequate screening tests.²

Hearing Loss and Speech Defects

No clear cut evidence is found in the research to correlate auditory acuity and reading level. However, there seems to be a general suspicion that speech defects and reading disability are related, but there is uncertainty as to which is the causative factor or whether both are influenced by other conditions. Severe speech disability

¹Margaret J. Early, "What Does Research Tell the Classroom Teacher about the Basic Causes of Reading Disability and Retardation?", in Reading Disabilities: Selections on Identification and Treatment, edited by Harold Newman (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., Inc.: 1969), pp. 56-62.

²Ibid.

requires expert diagnosis and remedial help. Immature or slovenly speech is usually improved by phonetic training in reading.¹

Neurological Difficulties

Research is still needed to determine the extent to which brain damage may prevent progress in learning to read when appropriate instructional methods are used. Fernald² and Strauss and Lehtinen³ have shown that brain-damaged children can be taught to read using specific methods. There are many experts who say any child can be taught to read if the proper techniques are used.

Other Physical Factors

Malnutrition, infections, and endocrine disturbances are the three general factors most frequently cited as possible causes for failures to learn to read. A considerably higher incidence of general diseases and defects is found among reading failures than among non-failures.⁴ Since poor health and low vitality may induce poor attention to learning and cause absences from school, a teacher can learn much from examining pupils' medical records. Evidence of poor health warns of skills, concepts, and

¹William Kottmeyer, Teacher's Guide for Remedial Reading (St. Louis: McGraw-Hill Book Company: 1959), p. 18.

²Early, "What Does Research Tell the Classroom Teacher?" pp. 56-62.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

habits included in earlier programs that will be deficient. With a child who acquires these skills, concepts and habits more slowly than the average, one day's absence can cause the complete loss of an important step in learning to read.

Personality Factors

Emotional difficulties are found frequently among retarded readers but research has failed to define the extent to which personality maladjustment may be the cause or the result of the reading retardation. Some writers believe that reading disability is a symptom of a basic emotional disorder and that treatment of the reading problem must be preceded or accompanied by attention to the emotional difficulties.¹

Lack of interest, inattentiveness, daydreaming, defeatism, truancy, and nervous mannerisms have been reported as concomitant with reading disabilities. Since emotional disturbances may be caused by reading failure, continued failure only serves to nourish these conditions. The older the disabled reader, the more intense and deep-seated his emotional reactions may become.

Environmental and Social Factors

In many studies of how these factors affect reading disabilities, it was found that maladjusted homes, poor intrafamily relationships, lack of home reading material, illiteracy, foreign language background, insufficient

background, impoverished play life, repeated failure and frequent change of school were consistent factors in the majority of disability cases.¹

Educational Causes

Expert opinion must be called upon to explore another possible cause of reading failure - - ineffective educational practices. Some authors even say the primary cause of reading failure rests on teachers who do not have the adequate knowledge of reading skills to teach them. And even if the teacher has the knowledge, the instruction may be haphazard and inefficient.²

Durrell furnishes these additional educational causes of reading difficulties.

1. Lack of adequate background to perform the reading task set.
2. Failure to master the early elements on which later disabilities are based.
3. Confusions resulting from instruction not correctly adjusted to the level and learning rate of the child.
4. The acquisition of faulty habits which impede progress.³

The causes of reading disability are multiple and all of these causes must be considered in establishing a

¹Ibid.

²Duffy, Systematic Reading Instruction, p. vii.

³Early, "What Does Research Tell the Classroom Teacher?", pp. 56-62.

program for slow learners since these students usually are the more retarded and invariably have the most anomalies.

Role of Administration

Administrators should aim at school programs where primary children acquire the sequential reading skills demanded in their use of text books and in higher levels of reading. A means must be established where each child can master the skills in his optimum time. This must be continued throughout the school years - even for better readers enrichment experiences must be provided.¹ This continuation at individual levels is especially imperative for slow learners.

Special programs at all levels must be encouraged for disabled readers. Specially trained teachers working with small groups, organized diagnostic clinics, and related remedial instruction to remove deficiencies revealed by diagnosis are just some areas where these programs can be effective.

Administrators must provide expert leadership and training to prepare teachers to handle new programs, especially those for slow learners. They must continually encourage the evaluation and adoption of curriculum that

¹William Kottmeyer, "Making Provisions for Disabled Readers", in Administrators and Reading, edited by Thorsten R. Carlsen (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), pp. 180-193.

will meet the needs of the individual pupils involved.¹ New ideas and precedures used to meet the needs of disabled readers must be constantly sought and improved. Local development of learning materials relevant to slow learning readers should be fostered.

Role of Teachers

Teachers employed or assigned to work with slow learners must be interested in working with children who have these kinds of problems. A teacher who was successful with normal children will not necessarily be successful with slower learning children. After working with children who learn rapidly and easily with a minimum of direction, it might be difficult to adopt his mode of instruction and expectations to suit the slow learner. Secondly, he must adjust his curriculum to the slow learner - it cannot be a watered down version of the regular curriculum.² The nature of the slow learner demands a new set of objectives that begin in the affective domain and move to the cognitive after the child becomes more comfortable in the basic skills.

The teacher has to be ever mindful of the characteristics of a good reading program for slow learners as previously discussed. He must be continually evaluating himself, his program, his students and his reading instruction and proper techniques for the slow learner.

¹Ibid.

²Johnson, Education for the Slow Learners, p. 301.

Another important facet of working with slow learners is to be ever concerned with the child's attitude and his self concept. These must be fostered and be made to flourish if learning is to take place.

Role of the Parents

The isolation of school from home and community is no longer possible or desirable. An effective reading program, especially one for the slow learners, should be a total community endeavor. Achievement in reading is very dependent on the student's attitudes, information and general background. Public relations are very important especially so that the child comes to school well equipped to learn and from an environment favorable to the school's philosophy. A child's home should provide an extension for the use of the skills stressed at school.¹ The proper motivation and encouragement for more positive self-concepts must be re-emphasized at home to benefit the student and his academic goals.

The teacher of slow learning children should encourage parental involvement in the child's reading program in terms of awareness of both his strengths and weaknesses, and in terms of encouragement for the extra effort needed to pull himself forward. In homes where the understanding

¹Kenneth E. Oberholtzer, "Contemporary Problems in Home and Community Relationships," edited by Carlsen, Administrators and Reading, pp. 93-105.

for the child's plight is lacking, the teacher should act to foster a more helpful attitude about the child's problem and build better rapport between parent and child, and between parent and teacher.

Importance of Student's Attitude
and Self-Concept

Changing a poor reader's self-concept by bolstering his feelings about himself is perhaps the first step toward improving the academic problems in any area.¹ In order to bolster his feelings he must be given many opportunities to achieve success and to be praised for his successes. Failures must be avoided as much as possible. Short-term goals well within his reach must be set. Recognition for these positive advances must be quick and enjoyable. Competitive ventures with those at a much higher achievement level must be avoided so that he will not meet frustration.

Since these slow learners are very often behavior problems because of past frustrations, the program should be highly structured so that there is little opportunity for deviant behavior and therefore little need to scold or correct behavior. Again, it is very important to begin instruction at the proper level so that frustration does not again compound an already serious problem.

¹Frances Pryor, "Poor Reading - Lack of Self Esteem?" The Reading Teacher, XXVIII, No. 4 (January, 1975), p. 358.

The behavior problems frequently present in slow learners are not necessarily inherent characteristics but rather the behavior of students continually frustrated in their attempts to succeed. These behaviors become substitutions or compensations for the behaviors they cannot seem to achieve.

A logical solution is twofold. A program must be developed that takes into account the characteristics of slow learners as well as content that will be meaningful to their environment and experiences. A value system that puts a premium on socially acceptable behavior must be taught and substituted for the one presently in use.¹ With a program that offers success and fulfillment, the child will be less antagonistic and more receptive to a behavior that is indicative of good attitudes and self-concept. He will be operating in a situation more conducive to learning and should be more receptive to acquiring the reading skills necessary to attain a high degree of literacy.

¹Johnson, Education for the Slow Learners, pp. 29-55.

CHAPTER III
SKILLS CONTINUUM FOR SLOW LEARNERS

Once a child has been referred to a slow learner's program, he must be placed at his proper level for instruction. This can effectively be done by the teacher and a teacher-made informal reading inventory or a number of commercially prepared placement tests such as Gates-MacGinitie¹ or Sucher-Allred². Along with this grade placement the teacher would assess the student to fit into one of three categories for skill instruction. These categories would be (1) the learner who cannot read at all, (2) the learner who knows some words but does not read fluently, (3) the learner who pronounces words but does not understand.³

This chapter will deal with the skills involved in each category, the method of testing for mastery, the management of the child's skill continuum, suggested materials for use with these skills, suggestions to foster better attitudes, and ways to transfer these skills to content area and recreational reading.

¹Arthur I. Gates and Walter H. MacGinitie, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (New York: Teachers College Press: 1972).

²Floyd Sucher and Ruel A. Allred, Sucher-Allred Reading Placement Inventory (Oklahoma City: The Economy Co.: 1973).

³Duffy, Systematic Reading Instruction, p. 36.

Skills for the Non-Reader

The children who would fall into the category of non-readers would not necessarily lack all reading skills but would read very poorly, be lacking of the initial phonetic and decoding skills and lack a sight vocabulary. The emphasis for these children would be the following skills.

1. Differentiating visual and auditory cues.
2. Sequencing, in terms of first and last symbols and sounds, and left to right progression.
3. Discrimination of gross and fine differences in visual and auditory cues.
4. Connection of visual symbols (letters) with the sounds normally associated with these symbols.
5. The use of context to anticipate unknown words.
6. Visual memory techniques for recognizing specific words at sight.¹

These are primarily skills associated with the beginning steps in the reading process. Many of these basic skills are missing in slow learners because they were never given the time to master them. In order to progress to the higher level skills, the learner must return to these basic steps and acquire them.

Mastery can be measured by criterion referenced tests of the following specific skills:

¹Ibid., p. 17.

1. Differentiate between letters and words similar in shape.
2. Differentiate among the sounds of m, d, s, h, l, hard c, t, b, p, w, r, f, g, j, sh, and the voiceless th at the beginning of words; and match these sounds to their corresponding letters.
3. Differentiate among the sounds of m, d, l, and voiceless s at the ends of words and associate the sounds with their corresponding letters.
4. Name the letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case).
5. Examine words from left to right and pages from top to bottom.
6. Recognize at sight 54 words, including ten chosen by the learner himself.
7. Use a combination of oral context and initial consonants for anticipating unknown words.¹

These skills must be approached by a variety of modalities. It is recommended to find a strength and work from it to build up weaker skills.

Once mastery of these basic phonetic and decoding skills is acquired the learner can progress successfully to the next plateau of skills.

Skills for the Slow Learner Who Knows
Some Words but Does not Read Fluently

This second category would perhaps include the bulk of the slow learners with reading problems in Kennedy Middle School. The skill objectives in this category would include:

1. Instant word recognition (sight vocabulary).

¹Ibid., p. 18.

2. Discrimination among easily confused words.
3. Using known words correctly in writing and reading.
4. Connecting phonetic sounds to their letters.
5. Recognizing basic vowel phonograms.
6. Principles of letter substitution.
7. Phonetic generalizations.
8. Recognition of prefixes, suffixes, compounds, and simple syllabication.¹

These skills would focus primarily on developing a larger sight vocabulary and a problem-solving approach to spelling and word analysis. These would be the steps necessary to launch the learner towards more independent reading.

Mastery can be measured by the use of criterion referenced tests of the following skills:

1. Recognize 300 high-utility words at sight.
2. Distinguish between 34 easily confused words.
3. Create and read sentences and stories using the words known at sight.
4. Differentiate among sounds heard at the beginning of words and match these with their corresponding letters.
5. Differentiate among sounds heard at the ends of words and match these with their corresponding letters.
6. Identify basic short and long vowel phonograms and use the principles of substitution to identify unknown words.

¹Ibid., p. 117.

7. Use context and understanding of the sound-symbol relationship of initial letters to identify unknown words.
8. Pronounce words containing deviant vowel patterns such as the diphthong and the schwa.
9. Pronounce words illustrating the major long-vowel generalizations.
10. Analyze and pronounce words illustrating the most common short vowel generalizations.
11. Pronounce words containing common structural beginnings and endings.
12. Pronounce words containing common silent letter combinations.
13. Analyze and pronounce compound words.
14. Analyze and pronounce contractions.¹

Once again the teacher must find areas of strength and work to enhance the weak skills. Because reading so closely integrates sight and sound, the slow learner must be exposed to a variety of techniques to build the auditory and visual discrimination skills. These skills the learners has now acquired enable him to decode most words he will encounter. The next level of skills will deal with encoding or bringing greater meaning to these words.

Skills for the Learner Who Pronounces
Words But Does Not Understand

Since reading is actually a twofold activity, the final step in the hierarchy deals with this difficulty duality. First a reader must translate intricate symbols to spoken words and then he must process what these words are saying

¹Ibid., p. 118.

to him. Because a slow learner, by nature and limited intelligence level, cannot achieve a high level of cognitive skills, this area will, of necessity, deal only with the basic comprehension tasks that do not reach high levels of abstractions which would tend to frustrate these learners.

The three basic skills for this category are interdependent and must be acquired sequentially to be used successfully. These are (1) the ability to conceptualize, or develop concepts; (2) the ability to classify or to find relationships between and among concepts and (3) the ability to do inferential thinking to answer questions, see implications and acquire purposeful knowledge. Since a learner must acquire concepts before he can classify, and he must be able to classify before he can make accurate inferences, these skills form a developmental hierarchy that must be sequentially advanced.¹

In dealing with comprehension Duffy talks about two kinds of words. One is said to show referent or content meaning which deals with the concept of the sentence. The other is functional and involves showing relationship of the content words, as in the sentence "We see goblins on Halloween." We, goblins and Halloween are content words and in order to fully understand the sentence the reader must understand each of these words. See, the and on are functional words that signal the relationship of the

¹Ibid., p. 213.

content words. If the reader cannot understand the relationship of the content words to each other, comprehension is lost.¹

The first step in conceptualizing is to understand the content meaning of a word by being able to (1) give a synonym for the concept, (2) define it in one's own words, (3) use it in an appropriate context, or (4) perform a physical operation indicative of its meaning.² Once a student has mastered the ability to use these steps on unknown words, he is ready to progress.

The next level of conceptual development would be the understanding of functional meanings by (1) performing a physical operation that indicates its meaning, or (2) stating the sentence relationship it signals. The functional words common to English sentences signal the following five essential meaning relationships:

1. Prepositions that signal both positional and time relationships.
2. Pronouns and their antecedents.
3. Words that signal contrast-comparison relationships.
4. Words that signal chronological sequences.
5. Words that signal cause-effect relationships.³

When content word and functional word meanings are mastered the child can master concepts. Following the

¹Ibid., p. 214.

²Ibid., p. 218.

³Ibid., p. 222.

ability of the learner to grasp total concepts, he can be taught to see meaning relationships such as use, sequence, composition or cause and effect. Analogies, story sequence pictures, finding common use and analyzing cause and effect of simple story events are ways to develop the ability to see meaning relationships. This, because of the higher level thought processing skills involved, will come laboriously to the slow learner and will need to be taken step by step and repeated often to expect mastery.

After conquering meaning relationships, the learner can move on to classifying objects. First he must grasp the concept of classifying and be able to group into sets things that share some quality or construction and process the criteria of belonging to the set or not.¹

From this level of comprehension, the next skill would be detecting main ideas and supporting details. After reading a paragraph, the learner must go through a classification procedure to extract the common denominator-- the main idea. From that point, the details should fall into place and the learner can see them as parts of the whole and list them accordingly.²

Beyond reading to extract the main idea, the learner should be directed to pull facts from the paragraph and meet one of the most important goals of reading -- to gain knowledge.

¹Ibid., p. 231.

²Ibid., p. 234.

The last and perhaps the most difficult step in this process is to answer inferential questions related to the material.³ The learner would be required to read a selection and then answer questions about the selection which would force him to read between the lines and beyond the page in search of understanding. He must learn to evaluate the facts given according to a series of interpretative questions about the selection that would give justification to his responses. There is a certain amount of experimental background necessary to develop this skill; the teacher must be certain that it is present.

These form the necessary skills continuum required of reading success beginning at any level since the skills can be presented and reinforced at different levels of reading. They spiral and expand as the learner's reading ability grows and his thought processing becomes more efficient and effortless.

Testing within the Program

The initial testing will, of necessity, be a placement test beginning with rudimentary skills and progressing upwards on the hierarchy. From this point each time a new skill is introduced, a pretest evaluating mastery of that particular level skill will be given. If the student passes the pretest by the established criterion, he will move on to the next skill or to an enjoyable enrichment activity. If

³Ibid., p. 340.

he fails to meet the mastery criterion, he will be directed to other activities that will reinforce and give practice on the skill he failed to master. After allowing sufficient time to complete several supplemental assignments, a second or post-test will be administered. These procedures would be followed throughout the continuum.

The testing will be done either in groups or individually depending upon the type of task required. The placement test should be carefully supervised so that the student does not become frustrated by tasks beyond his learning level.

Great care must be taken to establish the proper atmosphere for these testing situations. The tests themselves should be made as nonintimidating as possible.¹ It should be stressed that these tests are merely a means of finding the best way for the teacher to help each student. There should be no emphasis placed on a comparison of levels or scores. Each level of performance must be greeted with praise since it is the student's best effort.

An important part of this testing program will be the record keeping. Since each child should be at a level where success is easily attainable, the scores should be such that will build the student's confidence as he sees them recorded. Again, the writer must caution that a comparison of levels might be harmful to the student's

¹Ibid., p. 12.

self-concept and should not be stressed.

Imperative to this program, however, would be actual mastery of each skill and not just a record of the learner's exposure to that skill. Mastery for slow learners requires much repetition and reteaching. The teacher should not teach to achieve mastery of the test, but to achieve mastery of the skill itself. This is of prime importance in allowing the child to progress properly in the hierarchy of reading skills.

The record keeping will also serve as a means of ad hoc grouping for particular skill reinforcement. The use of McBee cards or class charts that indicate the learners who have mastered skills will facilitate functional grouping procedures.

Materials Suggested for Use

In order to teach these skills to the mastery level with slow learners, the process must proceed carefully, slowly and regularly to the desired objectives. It is the writer's belief that this can be accomplished by (1) beginning at the learner's proper instructional level, (2) using a wide variety of trade books and materials of high interest to the learner as a base from which to teach these skills and (3) using the skill objectives listed in this paper for the three categories. The probability of success of this program will be enhanced by a management system.

Since the writer geared this program particularly for the slow learners at Kennedy Middle School, the materials suggested for use are those readily available at that school. Those materials that would seem to work well with these students and these objectives would be the Barnell-Loft Specific Skills Series,¹ Guidebook to Better Reading,² Bowmar Reading Incentive Program,³ Phonics We Use Game Kit,⁴ Pacemaker Books Series,⁵ Listen and Think,⁶ New Practice Readers,⁷ Audio Reading Progress Laboratory,⁸ Clues to

¹Richard A. Boning, Specific Skills Series (New York: Barnell Loft, Ltd: 1967).

²John Rambeau, Guidebook to Better Reading (Oklahoma City: Educational Guidelines Co.: 1968).

³Ed Radlauer and Ruth Radlauer, Bowmar Reading Incentive Program (Glendale, California: Bowmar Publishing Corp.: 1968)

⁴Carmen T. Carsello; Arthur W. Heilman; Ruth Helmkap; Ailee Thomas; Consultants, Phonics We Use Game Kit (Chicago: Lyons and Carnahan, Inc.: 1968).

⁵G. R. Grosher, Pacemaker Books Series. (San Francisco: Pacemaker Story Books: 1962).

⁶Patricia Brewster, et al., Listen and Think (New York: Educational Development Laboratories: 1967).

⁷Don G. Anderson; Charles C. Grover; and Clarence R. Stone, New Practice Readers (New York: Webster-McGraw-Hill: 1947).

⁸Adrian B. Sanford; Diane Keech, and Marilyn W. Crosby, Audio Reading Progress Laboratory (Palo Alto: Educational Progress Corporation: 1970).

Reading Progress,¹ and Reading Skills Laboratory.² To maximize success of this program, the learner should not be placed in materials where he had already experienced failure. These materials are multi-level and would be used only after proper placement of the learner. Hence they could be used at varying levels with the three categories of readers defined by the writer, namely the non-reader, the reader who knows words but does not read fluently, and the reader who knows words but does not understand.

Affective Objectives

Research conducted in the areas of self-concept and the role of teacher expectations as they correspond to academic achievement shows them to be interrelated. Poor achievement leads to a lowered self-image which results in continued poor achievement. The inverse is true, to a lesser degree, for high achievement.³ Therefore, it is imperative that any teacher, and especially one of slow learners, should constantly be aware of a student's self-concept and strive to boost it whenever possible.

¹Adrian B. Sanford, et al., Clues to Reading Progress (Palo Alto: Educational Progress Corporation: 1972).

²William K. Durr, Reading Skills Laboratory (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co.: 1968).

³Leslie A. Burg, "Affective Teaching - Neglected Practice in Innercity Schools?" The Reading Teacher, XXVIII, No. 4 (January, 1975), pp. 361-362.

Prescriptive or diagnostic teaching suggests that the teacher's role is to provide the disabled reader with the skills he is missing. Many teachers meet failure in this manner because of the neglect of the affective domain.¹ When the child's self-concept has a debilitating effect upon reading, work on reading skills alone will be fruitless. When his self-concept falls so low that he expresses no desire to learn to read, it makes more sense to begin by attempting to build his self-concept. This dictates that the program must begin with successful experiences and continue as he is ready for new successful conquests. This would apply to materials he has failed with -- he is only reminded of his failure and his self-concept again drops. It is imperative then to begin at a child's strength and proceed to work towards his weak areas.

It would be important in a skills program such as this to give particular attention to the affective domain and provide a multitude of experiences where the learner meets success and praise as he works his way up the skill steps.

Additional Reading Experiences

Successful instruction in the content areas must also begin at the student's appropriate reading level. This is not sufficient. It should also emphasize continued skill

¹Ivan Quandt, Self Concept and Reading (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association: 1972), p. 8.

development rather than mastery of content material.¹ The content area teacher should teach the directed reading activity method and the SQ3R techniques and for the very poor readers, the slow learners of this paper, study guides that provide the learner with the organizational strategies he seemingly lacks.

Students should have purposes set for them in reading assignments. This can be done either by the teacher or by involving the students. New words or specialized vocabulary should be studied together. There should be no negative feelings when the student encounters new words. The teacher should supply an adequate experience background for the concepts being studied. The middle school classroom in particular should be a place of abundant and varied experiences to help build the background necessary for more involvement in the academic world.²

In order to have a good recreational reading program it must be concurrent to a skills program as the student's own means of utilizing his newly acquired skills. The teacher must be committed to the need for recreational reading and act accordingly.

Of prime importance is providing a specific and frequent

¹Richard L. Allington, "Improving Content Area Instruction in the Middle School," Journal of Reading, XVIII, No. 6 (March, 1975), pp. 455-461.

²Ibid.

time period that is devoted fully to recreational reading. This time should be free of other interruptions and pre-scheduled so that students do not have to spend time "finding something to read." Secondly, a wide variety of materials must be available so that the learner can easily find something that he is able to read successfully and effortlessly, and which is interesting to him. Equally important is providing an atmosphere that is conducive to comfortable reading. Good reading should be advertised on bulletin boards, through specific lessons, in everyday conversation with the students, and every way possible. Finally the child should be given a variety of interesting and appealing ways to share the enjoyable experience he has had. Not only is his successful expression of his private readings a reward to himself but also another way of advertising reading to his classmates.

Such a reading program would not only produce learners who can read but more importantly, learners who do read and enjoy it.

CHAPTER IV
IMPLEMENTATION

Teacher Selection and In-Service

There is little question that the key to success in any program will often be the personnel involved. Working with slow learners who have such a variety of intricate problems is a difficult process. The teachers should be selected carefully for various reasons. They should be qualified as reading specialists according to the standards set by the International Reading Association's Professional Standards and Ethics Committee.¹

In addition to the formal qualifications he should: reflect a pleasing personality that will encourage students and faculty members to want to cooperate with him in many ways; demonstrate the ability to take a student where he finds him according to his reading ability; create an optimistic atmosphere that is conducive to building confidence among his students; and follow the dictates of the program as outlined by his administration, ever evaluating and suggesting changes as the need arises.²

Since this is specifically a program for slow learners, the teachers must be aware of the special needs and

¹Donald C. Cushenbery, Remedial Reading in the Secondary School (West Nyack, N.Y. : Parker Publishing Co., Inc.: 1972), pp. 168-169.

²Ibid.

characteristics of the pupils involved.

After the teachers are chosen for any specially designed program, they must be trained according to the mandates of that program. The administration should provide expertise for the presentation of in-service training in the appropriate areas. For this particular program in-service training would involve:

1. Becoming familiar with the characteristic needs of the slow learners.
2. Developing an awareness of the specific skills organization suggested.
3. Acquiring competency in a wide variety of materials to be used.
4. Assessing accurately and efficiently the reading levels and deficiencies of the pupils involved.
5. Evaluating pupil progress and instructional techniques.

Before this program, or any other, can be fairly judged, it must be given the benefit of adequately trained personnel.

Physical Requirements

The reading room should be one of the most inviting in a middle school. It should be equipped with many tables and comfortable chairs, individual study carrels, and

efficient lighting.¹ Many media devices such as tape recorders, record players, overhead projectors, and filmstrip projectors should be available for use with a variety of materials.

With regard to the time element, classes should meet for thirty-five to fifty-five minutes per day, five days a week. In no case should the class meet less than three days a week since the rate of growth from meeting only once or twice a week is minimal.²

Evaluation

Evaluation would be twofold. Of prime concern would be the continuous evaluation of individual progress and needs. This would be done by the testing built into the program.

There would also be the need for continuous evaluation of the program itself. This would mean a constant examining of methods, materials, and of the personnel involved in the program.

Are the methods producing the desired results? Are they accepted and respected by the children involved? Are they varied enough to meet the needs of all concerned?

Are the materials meeting the instructional needs of the children with regard to specific skills? Are they interesting and appealing to the learners? Are they meeting

¹Ibid., p. 162.

²Ibid.

the needs of the affective domain of the learners?

The key to a successful program does not lie in the evaluation of methods and materials alone but in teacher evaluation. Is the teacher fulfilling the prescriptions of the program in a positive manner? Is the teacher using the materials effectively and correctly? Is he sufficiently concerned with pupil self-concept and affective teaching techniques? Is the teacher following the procedures established by the step-by-step sequential skill presentation of this program?

These questions must be ever present in the minds of personnel involved in the program. In order to achieve success, purposeful and thorough evaluation must be made. Both objective and subjective methods must be employed in a continual evaluative process. Statistical treatment of data must be made and defensible research methods must be employed.¹

The use of the following questions may be desirable for the purpose of evaluation.

1. Have all students in the program been given a chance to give a frank appraisal of the worth of the project?
2. Are standardized tests chosen which correlate with the common objectives of the reading program?
3. Are classroom teachers given a chance to evaluate the program through the observation of changed behavior in the classroom?

¹Ibid., p. 191.

4. Are the results of standardized instruments studied carefully to denote what instructional changes might be necessary to improve certain skill areas?
5. Are teaching materials chosen with care in light of the study of evaluation data?¹

Summary

It is the writer's belief that if a systematic program of reading instruction described on these pages were instituted and properly supervised, slow learners could show significant gains in reading ability. The program thus prescribed would reflect an expertise in reading skills and teaching techniques. It would be efficient and easily implemented. It would be systematic in the skills presented and their evaluation. It would encourage and facilitate diagnosis and individualization of instruction. Such a program would also be adaptable to many variables such as modalities, methodology, materials and classroom structure. It would meet the specific needs of the slow learner and facilitate his reading growth.

¹Ibid.

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