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January 1977

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### Recommended Citation

Skinner, Patricia A. (1977) "Do Secondary Reading Programs Work?," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol11/iss1/9>

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## Do Secondary Reading Programs Work?

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"What on earth did you do for Greg? I didn't believe the score on the test he took with you last hour so I gave him an oral quiz to see if he really knew the material. Do you know what? He really does know!" From this experience one of the social studies teachers in my building became aware that disabled readers are not necessarily lacking in intellectual ability. If only every content teacher would recognize this fact.

This incident took place three years ago but is relevant today. As more and more reading programs are introduced into high schools, all teachers are realizing that some of their poorer students are learning. They simply cannot function well with the visual modalities deemed essential for learning in education today.

Four years ago, Okemos School District decided to hire a reading specialist for the high school. I was lucky enough to be given a sizable amount of money and with administrative support, a Reading Center was created to help meet the needs of students in grades 9-12.

The focus of this Center is on software with hardware programs used as supplemental materials. A variety of materials were purchased to meet the needs of all reading levels from first grade through high school. This provides for remedial, developmental, and enrichment programs.

Today three classes of remedial and developmental reading are offered to students who may be referred or elect to take the classes. So that no one is penalized for having to take reading, English credit is given. A maximum of 15-18 students are enrolled each hour which enables individualizing the program.

After a group diagnostic test is given, with immediate feedback to the students, a program is prescribed, or an individual diagnosis may be recommended. Emphasis is placed on student successes rather than deficiencies to begin to rebuild

dwindling self-confidence and self-concept. A weekly contract is negotiated for the work a student will complete and is turned in on Friday with the completed work for evaluation.

Because some students function better by using self-motivation, some students are responsible for writing their own contracts completely. Others need some direction so some exercises are required by me and the student may choose something else on which to work. Sometimes these students work well with another student at their level. The rest of the students work better if their whole contract is set up for them.

Because these students often have difficulty expressing themselves on paper, a daily journal must be kept with a minimum of four sentences required. These journals not only serve as a basis for developing a useful spelling vocabulary, but also help me to really get to know and understand them as the unique individuals they are. Each week I collect these and respond to each journal with either a quick few words response or a whole page of encouragement or concern. I think that this is probably the most vital tool I use. One of the most common remarks is that I seem to care about them and their feelings or that I'm not too busy to listen to them. How else could I have found out that a girl was a potential suicide or someone was experiencing severe depression due to separation of his parents? For some it is sharing the joy of making a varsity team or anticipating the purchase of a first-car.

Another aspect of looking at them as individuals involves assessing their learning styles. Do they need auditory reinforcement or do they tend to be visual learners? By testing and noting information in CA's, I try to decide which program would best suit each student. If further testing is required, a referral is made to our school's Resource Teacher.

Another class, Speed Reading, is offered to upper classmen on a nine week basis. The program used is not a machine program but one which incorporates critical reading and study skills as well as rate improvement.

Students are free to drop into the Center at any time for help with other subjects. Tests are read to students. If the test becomes a learning task rather than a mastery test, a note is written to the teacher to that effect. This is really a beneficial experience if the student has trouble interpreting test questions.

Because I am a member of our School Team which consists of the Assistant Principal for Student Affairs, the Re-

source Teacher, Counselors, School Psychologist, and Social Worker, I am constantly aware of the needs of students. New referrals are given to me for diagnosing as quickly as they are identified by staff, counselors, or administration. The Team meets on a regular basis which makes for a much more consolidated effort to help students.

Every high school should provide a reading program to round out its curriculum. A reading specialist at this level can provide in-service, assess readability of texts, provide classroom demonstrations, and be a supportive arm to help all teachers become teachers of reading in their own content areas.



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