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AUTHOR Grant, Eugene B.
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ABSTRACT

The respective roles of remedial, corrective, and developmental reading relative to the high school reading program are delineated. The following reasons for reluctance in introducing secondary reading programs are noted: (1) the shortage of trained people to organize the program, (2) the lack of adequate financing, (3) a limited view of the make-up of the reading process, and (4) the reluctance of the secondary teacher to accept the responsibility of developing reading skills within a content area. A checklist is provided for evaluating a secondary reading program, and a guide for planning such a program suggests involving interested staff members through the leadership of a person especially trained in reading. It also emphasizes the idea that if the necessary specific reading skills are to be taught, they must be taught by teachers who teach in the content fields. The reading specialist serves the important function of assisting in the inservice training of the content teachers, but the correction of reading problems requires a cooperative effort. (WB)

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ELEMENTS IN AN ADEQUATE HIGH SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

For many years educators have been saying that ability to read well is gaining in importance. Our whole educational system has been under constant attack since the advent of sputnik in 1958. The first attack seemed to be aimed at the teaching of reading in the elementary school. Acrid criticism was leveled largely at the way beginning reading was taught. The great hue and cry from the critics was that we should not only teach more phonics but that the whole approach should be along the lines advocated by Rudolf Flesch in, Why Johnny Can't Read. This book was interpreted by many of the critics to say that most of the reading problems at all levels would be solved if only the teachers of beginning reading would teach phonics adequately. However, this kind of thinking seems only to reveal a limited concept of what constitutes reading. It fails to recognize that phonics is only an aid in knowing what to call a word, as important as that is, but in no way guarantees anything relative to comprehension or other elements in the total reading process.

In pointing the way toward improving the teaching of reading, certain terms have come into rather common use. One of the early terms coming into use was the term "remedial." There was a time when many schools sought to solve the reading problem by sending as many of the poorest readers as possible to a teacher called the remedial teacher. Her job was simply to help the students overcome any reading deficits that might be found to exist, often with little or no regard for a student's potential. While the selection of students has recently come to be more sophisticated in terms of consideration for a pupil's potential, it is still all too common a practice for school officials to seek to employ a teacher whose job is to take care of all the poor readers, with little or no concern for an appraisal of the reader's potential and

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likewise little or no concern for a program designed to reduce the supply of poor readers. In broad terms, however, a remedial program should be one that is designed to meet the needs of pupils who have a wide discrepancy between their present level of achievement in reading and their potential as measured by an intelligence test.

Corrective reading is another term in common use today and is intended to be used to describe a program for correcting the reading faults of those who not only may have a lesser extent of handicaps in reading, but who have a much less complex problem. Many of these students may be helped by a program of extensive reading, along with guidance from the librarian or reading teacher in the selection of materials. Students who are severely handicapped in reading or students having emotional envolvement would be more properly placed in a remedial program rather than a corrective program.

Developmental reading is another term that is in common use today and is the program most commonly thought of as the phase of a broad reading program that serves in preventing reading problems. In Bulletin A-5 of the Illinois Curriculum Program[1], developmental reading is described as follows: "A developmental reading program gives recognition to the sequential development of reading skills extending from the lowest primary grades through grade twelve, and possibly even into college. With this concept of the developmental reading program it is no longer assumed that a child learns to read in grade one, or grade two, or even in the primary grades, but that he learns a kind of reading at each succeeding level. We would like to think that the reader is developing his reading skills and abilities along a continuum with each step of his progress leading to a logical next step. At no time can all the steps be

1 Grant, E. B. and Karlin, Robert (Editors). Developmental Reading. Springfield, Illinois: Bulletin A-5, Illinois Curriculum Program, Pp. 8, 1964.

completed. For by the very nature of the reading process, to complete a step on the continuum is to make another step possible. It is a continuous process of growth.

When we speak of a developmental reading program, we embody the idea that reading achievement can be increased by properly directing our efforts. Traditionally, reading instruction stopped at about the end of the sixth grade and frequently no further development of reading skills took place. More recently it has been shown that if reading achievement is to reach greater heights, it can best be assured by offering an instructional program designed to meet the particular needs of pupils." Many junior and senior high schools are now embarking on a program to better meet the needs of their students.

There are four major reasons for the reluctance to introduce reading programs throughout the junior and senior high schools. One reason for the lack of prevalence of these programs in the secondary schools is the shortage of trained people to organize the program. A second reason is the lack of adequate financing. But the two chief reasons for relatively few high school programs involve misconceptions.

The first of the misconceptions is the limited view of the make=up of the reading process. Many secondary school teachers, most of them untrained in the field of reading, have a somewhat nebulous point of view as to what the reading process involves. Often the prevalent thought seems to be that reading is largely a process of word calling and some notion that word calling should in itself convey to the reader what the author said, if perchance the reader knows what the words mean. While no one would deny that the reader must know what to call the words, know what the words mean, and know what the author said, it is an extremely limited point of

·:ew which omits most of the intermediate steps in reading and gives few clues as to how the reader might improve his reading.

The second misconception responsible for reluctance to teach reading at the high school level is related to the point of view expressed above. Some would believe that since reading consists of these elements just mentioned, then clearly the teaching of reading is not in any way the responsibility of the high school teacher who often views his responsibility only as one of teaching his subject. He may even state that he really does not have all the time he needs to teach his subject, to say nothing of teaching reading too. "After all," he may say, "It is not my job to teach reading. Students should have learned to read long before they get this far." It is all too common that the need for better reading in the secondary school is recognized, but the need is seen as arising from a failure of teachers and pupils at the lower levels, with little or no acceptance of responsibility to meet that need themselves.

There are those who would be willing to help develop the vocabulary of their particular subject or to admit that the English teacher might have a responsibility in teaching reading but not even all of the English teachers would go this far.

In 1961, Bamman, Hogan and Green formulated a checklist which may well be used in evaluating a secondary school reading program.

"I. Is provision made for continuation of the teaching of reading skills throughout the grade levels of the secondary school?

1. Do faculty members accept responsibility for orienting themselves to the reading program of the elementary school?

2 Checklist adapted from Bamman, Henry A; Hogan, Ursula; and Green, Charles E., Reading Instruction in the Secondary School, Longmans, 1961.

2. Does each teacher plan for teaching the reading skills as an integral part of his subject matter?

3. Does each teacher recognize the reading problems which are involved in his subject area?

4. Are provisions made, in each subject area, for meeting the needs of students who have a wide range of abilities in reading?

5. Have the faculty members agreed as to the scope and sequence of skills to be emphasized at successive grade levels?

6. Are the study skills and habits pertinent to the various subject areas clearly defined and do teachers assume responsibility for helping sutdents develop more efficient study habits?

7. Are materials, personnel, and space available for a laboratory program for the retarded readers?

II. Are the materials adequate and consistent with the kinds of programs offered?

1. Is there a wide range of periodicals, books, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets for each subject area?

2. Are materials sufficiently varied in terms of interests and reading levels of all students?

3. Are materials adequate for the recreational needs of the students?

4. Is guidance given, in each subject area, in the use of reference materials and textbooks?

5. Are practice materials provided for the student who wishes to develop better reading skills?

6. Do trained personnel assist students in the location and use of reference materials?

III. Is there an adequate program of evaluation?

1. Are the results of standardized tests made available to all the teachers -- both total and subscores?

2. Are the teachers apprised of the reading levels of their students?

3. Do the standardized tests which are used cover adequately the skills needed for reading in each of the content areas?

4. Are students apprised of the results of evaluation?

5. Are provisions made through the counseling services for diagnosing cases of extreme reading disability?

6. Do counselors provide opportunities for the students to discuss their study and reading problems?

7. Are provisions made for superior students to seek, on a voluntary basis, extension of their reading skills?

8. Is a continuing appraisal maintained to see that the school program of reading improvement remains a vital and meaningful program involving all the students and all the faculty?"

While the checklist shown above tends to point the way toward an adequate high school reading program, there are a number of other desirable characteristics which should be noted. A high school reading program should be one planned by interested staff members through the leadership of a person especially trained in the field of reading or through the efforts of some other interested school person willing to give leadership. Programs planned by the staff have been found to be much more acceptable to the staff, than the programs planned for them. Although the planned program might not seem most ideal to some, it is thought to be unwise to plan a program that involves the use of skills far more complex than the staff has acquired. But as the program progresses and greater skills are attained through in-service training, che program may then be altered accordingly.

Every high school with a desirable reading program should have a designated place for a reading center where the reading consultant would maintain her office and would maintain a supply of professional materials in reading that could be shared with other staff members. The latest developments in materials should be kept so that they could be perused and evaluated by interested faculty members. The reading center should afford sufficient space for group sessions held for students needing corrective help in reading. It would be desirable to have enough sufficiently

trained staff in the center so that corrective help in reading would be available at all times during the day. Schools which have had such a program have reported great successes in this endeavor. The reading center should be the hub around which the entire high school reading program would revolve. In every high school there are many students who could profit from corrective work in reading. Many of these students would not be ones who are thought of as having major problems in reading, but merely students who could read better with proper guidance. Some of them might be the more capable students in school. Because of their successes, these capable students often do more than others in popularizing the reading program.

In every high school there are those students who are properly referred to as reading disability cases or ones who need special help, perhaps even individual help in becoming able to achieve on a level equal to their potential. This group of students is often found to be capable enough but simply have found no way to reach the level of their capacity. They can not improve sufficiently without some individual attention. Some part of the reading consultant's time might profitably be devoted to some of these most needful cases, but her chief effort should be in working with content teachers and with corrective groups.

Another of the chief elements in a desirable high school reading program is the teaching of the special reading skills in the various content areas. No high school reading program can possibly be successful without the acceptance or the willingness of the content teachers to make a logical contribution to the teaching of reading in their particular subject areas. This necessity may not be understood by all high school teachers.

The logic in expecting every content teacher to teach pupils to read her

subject is embodied in the idea that there are general reading skills and skills specific to a subject. The general reading skills are taught early in the school years, but the skills specific to a content subject must be taught by the content teacher as she introduces new content. It is not defensible for the content teacher to say that she does not have time to teach reading for all of her time is needed to teach the content. What is actually needed is for the content teacher to teach pupils the special skills that are needed to read that subject. In order for the content teacher to teach the specific skills that are needed, the student must have acquired some of the general reading skills, but often the real problem encountered as students attempt to read in a particular content area is that they have not acquired reading skills specific to that content.

To use an example from the field of science, let us suppose that the student is to read this statement: "The intensity of light is inversely proportional to the square of the distance from the source." Although the student may know the definitions of all the terms that are used in this statement, he still may not understand the statement. How could a reading teacher help him? Perhaps the science teacher might ask why does he not know what it means if he knows all of the words? The answer to these questions lies in knowing the concept involved.

Reading difficulty for the most part lies in two broad areas. Namely, the language of expression and the concepts involved. But if the student does not know the concepts, how can he truely understand what he has read? Is it likely that the reading teacher would be able to help him? Who is the most logical person to give the needed help? It seems quite obvious that only the content teacher should be expected to give the needed help.

To use another example from the field of elementary mathematics, let us assume that the student has read this written problem and has asserted that he does not understand it: "Find the area of a circle whose radius is two inches." What are the needed understandings relative to vocabulary? What understanding of relationships are necessary? The reading problem may well lie in the lack of knowledge of relationships. It is the content teacher's job to teach these relationships.

In a desirable high school reading program it is highly necessary that there be a wide variety of reading materials on many different levels. These reading materials should represent all kinds of interests so that a particular pupil coul find an abundance of material on an appropriate level. There is simply no way to give therapy without having proper materials available. If it must be said that a school does not have this variety of materials, it would also have to be said that it is impossible to carry on a desirable reading program. Not only should there be a wide variety of interesting reading materials, but also there should be a wide variety of a different type of materials called instructional materials It is impossible to conceive of any one set of materials or another set of materials as constituting a sufficient supply of instructional materials that sat the needs of all who might avail themselves of this service. There are as many needs in-so-far as a variety of instructional materials is concerned as there are varieties of interests. While it is appropriate to be on the lookout for appropr instructional materials, it should never be assumed that one could select a set o materials that would meet all needs. The search for appropriate instructional materials is a never-ending task.

Finally it should be said that while the English teacher is often held respo

sible for teaching reading skills it is not logical that she, and she alone, should be held responsible for the correction of all reading problems in high schools. She may well be the one person in the high school who knows more about literature than anyone else, and certainly this would stand her in good stead, but literature teachers must teach reading skills specific to literature in the same manner that the science teacher must teach the specific skills to the reading of science.

In summary, then, if the necessary specific reading skills are to be taught, they must be taught by teachers who teach in the content fields. The reading specialist will serve an important function as she assists in the in-service training of the content teachers so that they are able to teach the skills in the content subjects. She alone, however, must never be thought of as the one who has the responsibility of correcting all of the reading problems. This must be a cooperative effort.