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ABSTRACT

An experimental tenth-grade class was organized to provide instruction under one teacher in mathematics, science, social studies, and literature for a group of 12 underachieving students. Instruction consisted of four 41-minute periods. During the remainder of the school day the pupils received regular instruction in elective courses and physical education. Instruction focused on how to read in each subject rather than on the course content of that subject. Continuity of learning in the different disciplines was provided by the instructor who combined work in the different subject areas into an interrelated meaningful whole. It was found that reading, math, and language growth as measured by a pretest versus post-test comparison averaged better than 7 months' growth for the 5-month semester. A followup survey showed that 11 of the original 12 students were still in school and doing reasonably well as seniors a year and a half after returning to regular classes. A favorable change in behavior and in self-confidence was also noted for these students. (CM)

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Title: Self-Contained, Reading-Oriented Classes
in Secondary Schools

Sewanhaka Central High School District, which borders New York City, serves 12,000 secondary school pupils. A small percent of these pupils are, despite average-or-better intelligence, so seriously retarded in reading as to be unable to meet the reading demands of even a "modified" (i.e., "practical") curriculum. Moreover, pupils in the modified track in senior high school tend to remain in modified classes until they leave high school, either as graduates or, as is

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all too often the case, as drop-outs. Even specialized remedial reading instruction is usually not adequate to the task of furnishing such pupils with the level of skills necessary for their return to an academic program. Take, for example, the reading specialist working with a tenth grader who is reading at seventh grade level. Even if the remedial specialist were able to foster a year's growth with a year's specialized instruction, he would find the pupil unable to close the gap between grade placement and reading achievement; the pupil would be graduated still possessing a serious reading deficiency. Moreover, such one-for-one linear growth is not realistic in the light of either the experiences of competent reading specialists or our knowledge of the cumulative learning deficit. How, then, is the high school reading specialist to avoid the frustration to himself and to his pupils when even pupils who are making progress in remedial reading classes leave the "sheltered workshop" of the three-periods per week of remedial reading only to discover that, despite their progress (in the reading class), they are still unable to cope with the reading demands of their classes in literature, science, social studies, math, et cetera?

The only practical solution Sewanhaka District could devise seemed prohibitively expensive. The high cost of a reading-oriented self-contained, secondary classroom caused us to eliminate it from consideration. We felt it was "beyond" us even though such a classroom would offer simultaneously, the all-day concentration on reading instruction and materials in the various subject-content areas of low enough readability so that pupils could achieve some measure of success. Title I, ESEA brought the federal aid our plan required.

We set up our tenth-grade, self-contained operation and designated it the SCALE Program, SCALE being the acronym for S-elf C-ontained A-cademic L-earning E-nvironment.

Even with full financial support, problems remained. How could course credit in social studies, for example, be awarded unless course content were preserved? How would high school pupils who had already experienced three years of the departmentalization of secondary school react to having just one teacher? Would their parents consent to having them placed in such an unusual program? Above all, how could we get one teacher qualified to teach math, science, social studies, and literature, who would have at the same time, the necessary background in reading and in pupil personnel work?

Sewanhaka District was fortunate in being able to find as a SCALE teacher, Mrs. Virginia Whitener, a certified science teacher with impeccable credentials as a social case worker and as a reading specialist. A classroom with sound-insulated walls became the home of the SCALE Program. To provide the room with a "special look," carrels equipped with Projection Readers were placed around three walls. High interest/low readability books were secured for the various subject areas. Books were selected to differ from the texts of the regular classes, but to parallel them in content. Literature books were selected for relevancy and appeal to the world of NOW.

Tenth-grade pupils were selected for the program on the basis of failing or marginal academic performance, a reading score significantly below grade level placement, and an average or better intelligence. The mean IQ was 106. The mean reading score for these tenth-graders was 6.7 grade level. The widest gap between intelligence and reading level was exhibited by a pupil with a total IQ score of 114 and a standardized reading test score of 6.2 grade level.

Special consideration was given to pupils who seemed to exhibit behavior which might hinder learning. Eleven of the twelve pupils made scores on the California Test of Personality which indicated tendencies toward lack of adjustment. Seven of the twelve scored in the lowest decile of the C.T.P. in personal and/or social adjustment. Common to the group was a poor self-image, leanings toward anti-social acts, and feelings of not really belonging. Many previous teachers had used the term apathetic to describe both pupils and their parents. In general, pupils came from large families with lower middle-class backgrounds. Many had attended parochial elementary schools.

Selection of SCALE candidates was a schoolwide effort. The pupil personnel services team made the initial referrals. The SCALE teacher, herself, then scrutinized each candidate's cumulative record folder. The next step in the selection process was to interview both pupils and their parents. The SCALE teacher visited the homes to explain the program, and to solicit parent cooperation. At the same time, these home visits contributed to the teacher's knowledge of backgrounds and to her sensitivity. Pupils were given the option of participating, and all twelve pupils selected chose to enroll.

Before the start of classes, an evening parent-orientation meeting was held. In attendance were at least one parent of each SCALE pupil, the SCALE teacher, the high school principal, the Title I director and the reading/English supervisor. Response to this session and to other parent meetings held during the remainder of the semester, was enthusiastic and played an important role in the program's success.

Instruction in the SCALE Program began during the second (i.e., spring) semester and consisted of four, forty-one minute periods. During the remainder of the school day the pupils received regular instruction

in non-SCALE subjects such as academic electives and physical education. During this time the SCALE teacher was free to perform such PPS functions as counseling SCALE pupils, making home visits, and screening candidates for the next year's SCALE program.

Instruction in the SCALE classroom focused on how-to-read in each subject rather than on the course content of that subject. Instruction in social studies, for example, utilized Jack Abramowitz's book in the Follett Basic Learnings Program, World History. World history is the usual social studies content for tenth graders but instruction for our SCALE tenth graders subordinated historical content to the development of reading skills. While SCALE pupils were reading about the Crusades and learning the special vocabulary of that epoch, they were simultaneously, and perhaps more importantly, following a directed reading activity emphasizing the skill of determining cause and effect relationships. Whenever possible, the same reading skill was emphasized in the other subject areas. Cause and effect relationships were reinforced in the concurrently taught science lesson on erosion. Nila B Smith's Prentice Hall Be a Better Reader series provided the foundation for instruction in how-to-read science. As in all SCALE lessons, subject content was subordinated to reading skill.

The subject area showing the widest range of achievement was math. Some SCALE pupils lacked the basic math conceptual and computational skills; others had been receiving "B" grades in math. The wide range of instructional needs was met through individual and small group teaching. Pupils with severe math deficiencies received instruction in the verbal aspects of reading math problems and in applying fundamental operations from SRA's Kaleidoscope of Math Skills and Stein's Refresher Mathematics (Allyn & Bacon).

Instruction in English stressed the acquiring of the tactics needed for deeper literary interpretations, since most SCALE pupils exhibited a deficiency in the higher comprehension skills. The mechanics of language and the skills needed for oral and written communication were stressed through both diagnostic teaching and instruction based on the Follett programs Success in Language and Individualized English. Spelling and vocabulary development utilized Public School Publishing Company's Buckingham Extension of the Ayres' Spelling Scale and EDL's Word Clues. Continuity of learning in the different disciplines and a sense of organicity were provided by the instructor who combined work in the different subject areas into an inter-related meaningful whole. Attention to the development of specific reading skills was the thread that wove in and out uniting the different subjects. When the skill of outlining was being studied, the use of an outline was taught in English as a device for the pre-writing organization of a composition; outlining was taught in social studies as a means of noting subordination; science instruction involved outlining the sequential steps of a process; the math segment of instruction involved notetaking employing the Harvard outline format.

The organicity and reinforcement provided a uniform approach to instruction. The fact that one instructor taught all the subjects contributed to the excellent progress most pupils made in the program.

RESULTS:

Reading, math and language growth (as measured by a pretest vs post-test comparison) averaged better than seven month's growth (for a five-month semester). All students save three made significant gains.

These three pupils were previously judged the ones with the most severe affective problems, and they also had the lowest scores in adjustment on the California Test of Personality.

The most heart-warming indicators of progress are not of the sort which can be measured by tests. One girl's comment at a closing session went something like this, "What a relief it is to find we aren't failing because we're dumb. It was our reading all the time, but now we aren't ashamed to talk about it."

Although several of the pupils were on the verge of leaving school when enrolled in the SCALE Program, all save one of the original group are still in school and doing reasonably well as seniors a year and a half after returning to regular classes. Five of them have already been admitted (on merit) to local community colleges. Their parents, their guidance counselors, and the administrators of their school have all noted favorable changes in the pupils. Universally, discipline has entirely ceased to be a problem for these pupils who in the past were well known to the attendance office, the office handling discipline and the school nurse. PPS observers report that these former SCALE pupils show more self-confidence. The girls have become committed to extra-curricular activity (none was so involved before the start of the program). The boys have tried out for-- and made-- teams.

REFLECTIONS:

The reasons for the SCALE Program's success are several. The program's reading skill orientation has provided the necessary academic background. Pupils flourished under the fact that there has been no pressure ^{for them} to achieve. Books and other materials have been relevant and appropriate (from the point-of-view both of interest and level of readability.)

Pupils have had small group instruction with a great deal of during-class and after-class attention. Of these factors contributing to success, Mrs. Whitener, the SCALE teacher, ranks the reading instruction as making the smallest contribution, the small-size group, and the individual attention it made possible as the most important. Her end-of-semester-report concludes: "Teachers talk and frequently dream of what they would do if they had small classes, sympathetic administrators, interested and cooperative parents, the necessary supplies and materials, time to adequately prepare lessons, and time to spend knowing their students. As the teacher in this experiment, I have had all these. It has been a tremendous experience which few teachers are privileged to know."

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