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ABSTRACT

A problem-solving evaluative approach is described for an ESEA/Title III program in Topeka, Kansas. One problem in the program was to identify the reading curriculum needs of the 34 elementary, 11 junior high, and 3 high schools with a total enrollment of 25,000 students. There were 1,000 students 2 or more years below their expected level who had an IQ of 90 and above in grades 4 through 9. These criteria were used for selecting students for the remedial program. A clinic was designed with a professional interdisciplinary staff to provide diagnostic services for severely disabled readers. Through cooperation with a local university, 25 teachers received training as reading teachers under a 3-year program and returned to their classrooms. In order to achieve adequate local funding, parent groups, school staff members, central administration, and the board of education were made aware of the services offered and the results. The role of the reading consultant in public schools was viewed as that of administrator and subject specialist. Some of his activities included providing instructional procedures, inservice teacher training, and instructional materials; evaluating teacher performance; and working with public and school officials. (WB)

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The Reading Consultant in the Public Schools

Eldon L. Storer

This paper looks at the reading curriculum from the stand-
point of the director-consultant of a diagnostic reading clinic
and remedial services.

One way of evaluating a reading program is to look at the
disabled readers. If disabilities show to be school fostered,
provisions should be made to make alterations in the reading
curriculum. Even though other disabilities appear to be consti-
tutional in nature, adequate educational provisions need to be
made to prevent or correct those disabilities.

The reading consultant in the public schools is not only
an administrator, but a subject specialist as well. Too often

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the consultant is either one or the other. Or else he is biased toward a particular approach, strengthening only one area of the program and leaving others unattended. This is not to say he shouldn't have a specialty nor be committed to certain ideas. His main concern is that of problem solving, for without a problem to solve no effort is needed to improve education.

Our concern in Topeka, Kansas became one of solving problems. A project was approved for a 3 year grant through ESEA Title III which concerned our immediate problems. The first step was to identify the problems, and then solutions were designed. This involved both administration and reading specialty on the part of the consultant. New positions were opened to direct the project and share the load of the consultant, especially for the disabled reader.

The second problem was to identify the reading curriculum needs of the 34 elementary, 11 junior high (grades 7-9) and 3 high schools with a total enrollment of 25,000 students. The system has the continuous progress plan in the elementary schools, using a well-known basal reader with several supplementary sets and libraries in each school. The junior high schools had a limited remedial program. High interest-low vocabulary books were in the libraries. Intensive training was held for beginning Topeka teachers, child study courses were available to teacher teachers, and Topeka's Municipal Washburn University offered night, Saturday and summer courses in reading. Curriculum study

groups continued to evaluate the effectiveness of the adopted reading series. Achievement test results of the reading and arithmetic sections of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills did not vary more than .15 from national norms. With these things in mind, there were 1,000 students 2 or more years below their expected level who were 90 I.Q. and above in grades 4 through 9, which became the criteria for selecting remedial reading students.

Because of the success of a few remedial reading teachers in the past in Topeka, an extended remedial program was designed to place a reading teacher in each of the elementary and junior high schools. Each of the eleven junior high schools was assigned a teacher and three elementary buildings shared a teacher. A clinic was designed with a professional staff including a director, psychologist, counselor, social worker and classroom teacher. The clinic provided professional diagnostic services for severely disabled readers from the remedial classes throughout the city. The clinic director was the administrator of the entire reading clinic and remedial services, as well as the reading specialist-consultant.

The third problem was to employ the 25 reading teachers and clinic staff. The clinic staff was found, but trained reading specialists were unavailable. Therefore, the project, in a cooperative endeavor with Washburn University, built in 12 graduate hours to fulfill requirements for the reading specialist. Classroom teachers were chosen to participate as remedial teachers with built-in training. Teachers were to take diagnosis of reading

difficulties before the beginning of school. A two week workshop was held prior to the opening of school, and two afternoons each week were used for inservice training for which 6 hours of credit were given in a Practicum.

This training program continued for three years, placing teachers back into regular classrooms as new teachers became part of the program. At the end of three years, many schools had reading teachers in their buildings who could double as resource teachers. There were also a number of teachers to choose from to bring back into the program as permanent reading teachers.

A fourth problem was to sell the program to the school district public in order to receive adequate local funding for continuation of the reading services when the federal funds were gone. In order to do this, four groups of people must be aware of the services offered and the results. They were parent groups, school staff members, central administration and the board of education. At this point the clinic director-consultant became a publicity man. Reading teachers were used to organize faculty meetings in their buildings, and the City-wide PTA encouraged local PTA groups to invite the reading staff on their program. Periodic meetings were held with central administration and the board of education to present progress reports. Local news media and annual progress reports were made. Leading authorities were brought in to speak to teachers and evaluate the program.

Coordinating the remedial reading project into proper perspective within the total reading program became the final problem. This was accomplished through emphasizing diagnostic classroom teaching throughout the training program, and consulting with classroom teachers concerning problems they encountered.

This summary of the Topeka reading project provides background for the remaining portion of this paper. A review of the project can be found in The Reading Teacher, February, 1970. This year finishes the third year of the project. The writer was assistant director for the first two years and director the last. A budget appeal was approved for the continuation of the program. Some of the activities of the director-consultant follow.

The consultant is the one to see to it that things get done. He must promote programs, get adequate funds and be responsible for administration. My biggest concern is to get it done in the classroom. Teaching reading in kindergarten, changing to team teaching or ungraded class will not answer questions unless the change occurs in the classroom. Too often we talk about the program so much that we never get to the classroom with change.

The consultant must relate research to practical situations, then place it into context for presentation. For example, reading the education literature says the overhead projector is an advantageous instrument for instruction. Its theoretical advantages are:

1. Visual stimuli increases learning.
2. It can be used in a lighted room.
3. Published and teacher-made material may be used.
4. The teacher can prepare transparencies ahead of time.
5. Attention can be directed to the screen or instructor by turning it on and off.

6. The teacher can face the class at all times.
7. Maintenance is minimal.

The consultant, rather than mere demonstration could present a lecture which would demonstrate its advantages. To illustrate the necessity of flexible grouping make 4 transparencies with a deck of playing cards. These cards can be glued with rubber cement to a piece of paper, laying the transparency over it and run through the copier. The first is 13 cards scattered randomly, the second place the cards in groups according to suit, with the joker in the middle. Third, show the 3,4,5, and 10 of diamonds and the fourth, place the 10 of diamonds with the JQK of clubs. The dialogue would follow something like this:

Transparency 1, "a class is dealt to you randomly, boys, girls, white, black, dull, bright -

Transparency 2, " you begin to group them as they most logically might fall, but one (joker) doesn't seem to fit -

Transparency 3, " as you begin to work with one group, one of those deviates so -

Transparency 4, " he may fit better in another situation."

Having illustrated a point the consultant can continue his discourse. Students have seen, in actual operation, the ease of use, and value of the overhead.

Research says that students with normal intelligence will make more progress in a remedial situation. Although our project was based on this premise, we found many students in the 80 - 90 I.Q. group making remarkable progress while some 100

I.Q.'s made less. To put this in a practical sense, we turn to the classroom teacher in selecting students. She has a pretty good idea of the reliability of an individual I.Q. score. It seems a shame to miss service for students doomed for low scores because of their different background. Remedial teachers like choosing only above 90 I.Q.'s because they can follow more traditional instruction and they like to dismiss students who are resisting instruction. The consultant must become a master teacher at this point to encourage teachers to work with the less desirable youngsters. We tell teachers to reinforce successful experiences for youngsters, so the consultant must work with teachers in like manner. He must be ready with techniques for the learning disabilities and present them to teachers in such a way that they become their ideas. By watching student responses, the consultant can reinforce teachers positively. One of the best ways to encourage creativity is to ask them to present their technique to other teachers.

Although remedial service is recommended daily, even 2 days a week classes progress favorably. Teachers who work with some students 3 days and others 2 days remark that they need to meet the 2 day schools more often. But this works to an advantage too. When teachers don't work daily, the classroom teacher retains some responsibility and the remedial and classroom teacher work more closely together. As for the 2 day schools, remedial teachers

are inclined to work harder to keep those students moving as rapidly as others. It seems that the duration of time rather than intensity of daily instruction is important in developing proper attitudes.

High interest-low vocabulary books have flooded the market. Because of lack of quality reviews in the basic book selection aids, librarians have hesitated adding these to the library shelves. However, look in any library and see whether Charlotte's Webb or Butternut Bill is more nearly worn out. A consultant might ask teachers if they always read at their instructional level, or if they read the newspaper also. Why expect children to always read at their maximum level? We have found some high interest-low vocabulary books that leave much to be desired, but children will read them. The book Cattle Drive offers more in the pictures than in the script. We have found that children like to "fill in" parts of the story, which is a more useful lesson than any question that may be asked about the story.

The reading consultant should see that all teachers, both regular classroom and remedial, understand the Informal Reading Inventory. Formal testing using a designed instrument is not necessary for all students, but advisable for many. This simply means that when a student makes 5 word recognition errors in one hundred words or fails to demonstrate 70% comprehension, he is reading material too difficult or with inadequate functional skill.

An excellent in-service workshop activity would be to gather up some discarded graded readers and cut them apart providing each teacher with selections of each grade placement which she can bind with masking tape and tag board. Questions should be designed dealing with main ideas, facts, and interpretation. A child should be asked to tell what he read, which will often make it unnecessary to ask specific questions. The student who makes "little word" errors and/or corrects his own errors can often be given simple material for practice and continue in the basal material with much individual help. The reading specialists may be called in for assistance in designing specific programs for others.

A remedial teacher, working with fifty students throughout the week can expect a mean gain of 2.0 in one year. This means that many students will reach grade level, or their potential, but many will need additional remedial work. In our program our first group of fourth year students are now sixth year. A follow-up study showed about one third of them in the program the second year and 1/2 of those returning the third year. An interesting sideline showed up of Clinic students. It was found that many made little progress the first or even second year, but jumped way head the third. It was felt that the constant successful experience, even though the reading level failed to rise, finally convinced them that they could achieve. Many techniques had been tried making it impossible to conclude which had the most effect.

The typical excuse given by the classroom teacher when faced with the necessity to provide individual help to a child who is either in the transition period of returning to the normal classroom activities without remedial assistance, or providing corrective techniques for poor readers is "But I don't have time with all the others I have". A consultant knows this before confronting the teacher, so prepares accordingly. First he reviews or designs, as the case may be, the remedial program then explains it to the classroom teacher, emphasizing that this takes part of the burden of developing unlearned reading skills on someone else. Special materials are recommended or supplied to replace the basal text to insure against placing him at a frustration level, and then, rather than giving her a chance to say she hasn't time, ask her how much time she has. Whether her answer is 5 or 30 minutes daily, then plan what she can do with that time. The consultant must plan follow-up visits to insure adequate instructional procedures. The teacher may be asked to readjust a few minutes of time on less relevant classroom activities to make more time for individual help.

Teachers must be encouraged to allow children to work independently. Carefully selected programmed activities help. In working with a teacher who could not get a youngster to "read", I encountered on a follow-up study, the teacher trying to get the child to hand in his assigned written work. "All he does anymore is read", she said. The point was, she had already met her goal successfully,

but didn't recognize it. Sympathy may have been in order in a composition class, but Remedial Reading?

Another problem the consultant faces is to be able to provide a classroom with sufficient instructional material for various reading levels. A typical sixth grade class will vary 7 years, possibly from level 3-9. How could a single sixth grade text provide the needed instruction? It is the consultant's task to provide the kind of instructional procedure to use, whether inter-class grouping, individualized, etc., and to see that there are appropriate materials at proper levels, properly used.

In summary, the consultant is responsible for administration and reading specialty. The major problems for him to solve are:

1. Provide goals and instructional procedures for a complete developmental reading program for all students.
2. Provide inservice training for all classroom and remedial teachers.
3. Provide needed help for teachers, both teacher initiated and consultant initiated.
4. Provide adequate instructional materials.
5. Evaluate teacher performance.
6. Work with public and school officials to insure their support.
7. Design and encourage others to design research.
8. Keep abreast of the trends and research in reading.

As to summarizing the reading specialty of the consultants job, a look at learning modalities can serve as appropriate media.

Recent research points to a possible modality strength within students. That is to say, some learn best through auditory methods, others visual, and still others a tactile-kinesthetic method. The combination of these is believed to help most students. Teachers are told to use all methods in presenting material to add experiences and help them transfer to many situations. Some researchers believe, however, that one adds to the confusion of some youngsters by switching from one to another. A well developed, mature youngster can probably learn equally well through all modalities, but others only one. The implications are for teachers to be aware when students show signs of confusion, and concentrate on one method that works best for him, helping him transfer to other modalities after he has mastered a specific technique.

Besides being administrator and reading specialist, the consultant must be creative in working with all kinds of people and reading ideas. For without a problem to solve, no effort is necessary to improve.