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ABSTRACT
                A discussion of reading instruction for disadvantaged
children leads the author to explore previous definitions of
"disadvantaged" and redefine the goals in teaching disadvantaged
children. Individualized reading instruction is urged and two
programs--one in Florence, South Carolina, and one in Gary,
Indiana--are compared. The Florence program was designed to increase
the students' self-confidence by providing ways for them to
experience success in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The
Gary program agreed that self-confidence building was important but
emphasized the cognitive more than the affective domain. The Florence
program included an initial administration of reading tests to the
students, a screening of teachers to find which ones wanted to teach
classes of disadvantaged students, and a five day inservice workshop
for teachers. The workshop outlined objectives, emphasized the
importance of teaching students at their own levels, and deemphasized
the importance of drill in teaching reading skills. The Gary program
had only a one-half day workshop in which traditional, cognitive
approaches to reading were outlined. Recommendations for reading
programs for the disadvantaged are made. References are included.
(AL)

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READING INSTRUCTION FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

The relatively new emphasis upon education for the disadvantaged

has found few teachers well prepared for the teaching of reading to

these students who are in such need of their competence. The refined

intention in this paper is to persuade secondary teachers to seek

assistance which is essential to them as reading teachers. Such

assistance can be found in periodical institutes and workshops which

will increase their knowledge and enable them, as teachers, to combat

some of the malignancies resulting from the disadvantagement of their

students. Several questions require consideration and response: How

much are teachers willing to do in order to develop more proficiency

in reading for the disadvantaged student? Are teachers willing to

establish reading as a priority in our schools, or will they fool them-

selves into complacency by assigning more and more of the usual analytic

renderings of literature? What kinds of responses can be expected

from these students who have limited backgrounds? On the other

hand, what is expected of teachers who are channeled to comply with

the system?

There are tremendous pressures placed on the disadvantaged stu-

dents, as well as on the teachers, to make these students reach the

designated national average, as though paradise must lie in that direc-

tion. Yet, to be average means to perform below the norm of the ex-

pected level, and then to be euphemistically labelled "underachiever".

In many instances these standards are set up by panels of individuals

who have, for years, ignored causes that would determine the fate of

these students who would eventually become underachievers.

First, let us define the labelling term, "disadvantaged". Cohen

and Reinstein (3) refer to the disadvantaged as victims of the insid-

ious practice called "drop out" because they could not meet the time-

table and rate and, for various reasons, could not accept the content

of their courses. Authorities such as Lewis (6) interpret labelling

terms as inaccurate and meaningless, and indicate that some of these

tags might even arouse hostility. Lewis further states that labelling

individuals can affect planning and programming. According to Livingston,

(7) some teachers perceive these students, who have been labelled dis-

advantaged as slow, lazy, brain-damaged, or emotionally disturbed, de-

pending upon the current fad. According to the Division of Compensa-

tory Education (4), BESE (Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education),

the disadvantaged child is poor; his family relationships, most probably,

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are unstable; desertion, illegitimacy, relatives, and lodgers comprise

his familiar background. He and his family live in a depressed neigh-

borhood. He brings to school an unfamiliarity with the written word,

and by the ninth grade, he may be from one to six years retarded in

reading. Far more importantly, positive attitudes toward education,

such as the desire to achieve and learn, are crudely formed or entirely

lacking. We (BESE) could call him an underachiever and be accurate, but

this term cannot capture the full import of what deprivation really

means. Many Caucasians interpret "disadvantaged" as a label synonymous

with "Negro" or "black", although this fact is disputed by some writers.

In keeping with the aforementioned definition, the term "disadvantaged"

will be used in this paper to refer to any child who is born in, or

brought to America, with all or part African heritage and who, therefore,

must suffer the consequences of being deprived in one way or another.

Students invariably know when they are being labelled, whether as

individuals or in a group and this, in turn, may cause them to develop

negative attitudes toward the whole reading process and to become re-

bellious toward society. It is relatively easy for teachers on the

secondary level to pass on the blame for such deficiencies and attitudes

to teachers and schools of the past, which they regard as poorly quali-

fied; in addition, some teachers make explanatory remarks about the dis-

advantaged students themselves, such as "It's their environment", or

It's their heritage".

It takes courage for a student to admit being "disadvantaged"
while he is striving to acquire, in a few months, what other students
with unlimited opportunities have gained over a period of many years.
Even if such attainments were possible with a subject as complex as
reading, students on or above reading level, exposed to such a crash
program, would make even greater advances. Consequently, there would
still remain the gap to bridge or the catch-up race to be run by the
disadvantaged student.

Programs may be organized, training procedures prescribed, data
of all sorts obtained, and expensive materials and equipment purchased,
but unless each student is thought of and worked with as an individual,
most of the time and effort of both teacher and student has gone to
waste. The fact must be faced that the individuality of students does
exist, and that there is difficulty in convincing secondary teachers
that a single textbook cannot solve the problems of an entire class. (5)

The purpose of this paper can best be developed by means of con-
trasting, in most instances, and comparing in others, two papers pre-
viously presented at International Reading Associations, descriptive of
exemplary reading programs in separate school systems. Reports of these
two programs in Florence, South Carolina, and Gary, Indiana, were made
by Louise Scott (9) and Jennye Alsobrooks (1) respectively.

Recognizing Individualism

Louise Scott (9) viewed the Florence, South Carolina, Public Schools
as having recognized the need for individualized instruction in reading
beyond the elementary level, and having done something about it. This

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program was designed to help the high school student increase his
self-confidence, and to provide ways for him to experience success
and coordinated training in listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Consequent to their program, the number of dropouts was reduced and
the students' enthusiasm for reading was greatly increased.

Alsobrooks, (1) who described the reading program in Gary, Indiana,
does not disagree with the concept that the disadvantaged should be
given self-confidence. Other authorities go even further to state that
the parents should be included in such enlightenment since the lack of
positive self-concept is fostered in the homes of many disadvantaged
students. Lewis (6) supports the idea that parents should be involved
and avers that they should be given the highest priority. Though this
may be true, it is more easily said than done. Alsobrooks (1) does not
reveal how the teacher will go about including parents, if once the
opportunity presents itself to communicate with these parents. On the
other hand, both school systems could make use of the suggestions offered
by Lewis for the involvement of parents.

Tests

Scott (9) reported that the procedure in the Florence Public Schools
began with the administering of reading survey tests. Consideration can-
not be given to this initial step without a reminder to the teachers that
many important objectives will not be measured by reading tests. Giving
support of this fact, Cebulash (2) states that standardized tests should
not be the sole measure of reading achievement and ability, but should be

supplemented by diagnostic tests and inventories which, in totality,
will provide a more accurate picture of each student's reading skills
and weaknesses. Furthermore, Graham (5) says that students should be
told of these weaknesses and of their strengths. In conjunction with
his statement, Graham reveals some of the deceptions of secondary
students, who often will not even try to answer questions on tests be-
cause of their previous repeated failures throughout earlier grades.
Thus the question is posed as to the validity of test results. This
term, "validity", is characterized by Livingston (7) as being a slippery
and cover-all term that conceals the fact that there are several kinds
of validity: content validity, face validity, concurrent validity, pre-
dictive validity, and construct validity. In other words, teachers should
beware of pitfalls in the interpretation of tests.

With full knowledge of these pitfalls and great care to avoid them,
the Florence Public Schools chose to use the test results with two groups,
experimental and control, depending on the level of difficulty in read-
ing, as a basis on which to organize a four-phased program.

Attitudes

The second step was to choose teachers who had an interest in and a
desire to participate in the program. Along with this concern should
come their grasp for self-betterment of themselves as teachers, and an
optimistic vision for their students, to be realized through effective
teaching techniques. According to Alsobrooks, (1) any teacher is a
teacher of reading, whether or not he is interested in or desires to work

with disadvantaged students.

Both Scott (9) and Alsobrooks (1) concurred that education is
developed through the rapport existing between teacher and student.
Alsobrooks (1) went so far as to list ten tips by which respect may
be gained from the students; these are, incidentally, unnecessary if
all students are truly thought of by their teachers as human beings,
and are given equal shares of respect in their own rights. If teachers
simply swallow Alsobrooks' prescription without employing their own
sound judgments and imaginations, their objectives as teachers are de-
pleted before they begin.

Plan of Operation

A distinct advantage of the program in the Florence Public Schools
is the fact that it included a five-day workshop, instead of the mere
half-day workshop in Gary, Indiana.

Some systems develop periodical workshops to explain and demon-
strate materials alone, while other systems set aside released time of
one day a month for reading teachers to attend workshops. According to
Zimmerman (10), "only a handful of teachers in the secondary schools have
ever had a single course in the teaching of reading - let alone become
expert at the job". Of what assistance, then, can a half-day workshop
be to a teacher trained in a content area other than reading?

Admittedly, it is true that years of advanced training are a pre-
requisite for teaching; inservice training, however, is thought to be
infinitely more important in the making of a good teacher than pre-service

training. The workshop can be that means to the end of organiz-

ing new teachers who may garner viable ways of teaching reading from

experienced teachers, in exchange for their own innovative ideas.

A well-planned workshop can be the realization, by one teacher, that

other teachers have similar problems and he may learn the solutions

used to eradicate these problems.

To return to the comparison of the two separate school systems,

the Florence School workshop purported to outline objectives, to stress

the importance of teaching the students on their levels of achievement

instead of teaching books, and to help each student realize his poten-

tials, rather than to employ the popular method of repeated practice

drills of reading skills with which the students are usually already

familiar. In other words, the popular system involves covering a said-

text book and a said-number of pages by a said-deadline, which are to

be regurgitated on a said-day in a wrestling match between note paper

and lead pencil. Thus, time is wasted, energy expended and little, if

any, progress is made.

The half-day workshop in Gary, reported on by Alsobrooks, (1) in-

cluded the encouragement of teachers to use the Survey, Question, Read,

Recite, Review (SQ3R) study plan as a means of stimulating students. The

study plan is a poor excuse as a stimulant for underachievers, since it,

in itself, requires mastery of certain skills in reading. Alsobrooks

seems, as well, to give her blessing to a reading teacher who began her

classes by explaining the reading process. It is obvious then, that

whereas the Florence Public Schools opened with a plan in the affective domain, the Gary workshop employed the cognitive domain. The imagination could not possibly devise a more lackluster beginning for a class of disadvantaged readers.

Both Scott (9) and Alsobrooks (1) conceived of the psychological value of selecting materials adjusted to the maturity and needs of the students. Some of the aids listed by them included: newspapers, forms, (e.g. application, social security, insurance) telephone directories, magazines, practice books, tapes and paperbacks. In addition to these, Loretan and Umans (8) listed in their book, Teaching the Disadvantaged, excellent materials which might be used for young adults.

Results

Evaluative results of the Gary program were not given, but innovators of the Florence program indicated growth in the affective and the cognitive domains by stating, respectively, the students' verbal admissions of the realization of success and the results of statistical data.

Recommendations

Subsequent to a detailed appraisal of these two programs this author makes the following recommendations:

To the teacher:

1. Have a desire and an interest to work with the "disadvantaged" children.

2. Have a knowledge of what is to be taught.

3. Have a mastery of techniques to be used in that which should be taught.

4. Above all, have the belief that the students can achieve certain proficiencies.

Furthermore, a program for the school and the teacher:

1. Should be guided by needs of the students and sound objectives;

2. Should include training for administrators, teachers and aides, by means of periodical institutes and workshops or other feasible training sessions or projects;

3. Should provide materials, equipment and opportunities to meet its needs and objectives;

4. Should include testing instruments which measure beyond the reading skills to be developed.

Conclusion

To summarize, inasmuch as these children are labelled "disadvantaged," individualization is the proper step to take toward tailoring a program to meet their needs. All programs should include an intensification of the instructional plan in such a way that the skills which ought to be acquired and the level and rate at which they ean be acquired are compatible with the students and their needs.

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