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ABSTRACT

Both the remediation of reading deficiencies and the alleviation of severely deviant behaviors are necessary for the proper social and emotional development of the child and for his normal academic achievement. A successful reading program for children with behavior problems provides for daily success. Initial and continued teacher reinforcement creates increasingly effective self-reinforcement within the pupil. After thorough diagnosis, the teacher furnishes the pupil with reading materials which offer challenge without frustration. Reading activities include individual oral and silent reading, choral and team reading, and writing. There are few requirements for independent study on word attack or study skills. When the teacher plans a reading program which allows for success with a minimum exposure to failure, reinforces each small achievement, and gives unwavering support for all progress, the pupil has an opportunity to overcome the reading dificiency and to make a more satisfactory social adjustment within the classroom. (Author)

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Reading for Children with Problems in Social Adjustment

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READING FOR CHILDREN WITH PROBLEMS IN SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

The child with problems in social adjustment constitutes one of the major concerns in education today. Not only is such a child himself severely handicapped in his approach to the school program, but classmates, teachers, and other school personnel all must endure the effects of his anti-social and often disruptive behavior. Learning for the entire class may be greatly diminished at times because of the attention which the teacher must give to dealing with one or more problem pupils.

Frequency and Nature of the Problem

Social-emotional maladjustment in children is far more common than is realized by the public, or perhaps even by the schools. Studies reveal that moderate to severe maladjustment is exhibited in from 15 to 50 percent of pupils from kindergarten through college, with the median occurence being about 25 percent, or one out of four (8). Also, social problems are found to be present in children regardless of intellectual capacity, socio-economic or ethnic background, sex, or age. Problems in social adjustment are not always chronic, although without proper treatment the child may not be able to overcome a serious social-emotional handicap. Overt deviant behavior may be exhibited in a variety of ways, perhaps the most common of which is agressiveness. The agressive or hostile child often disturbs the class and the teacher and demands some sort of attention. Another form of maladjustment is

found in the withdrawn child, who usually does not attempt a great deal of social interaction and may exhibit a don't-care attitude which cuts him off from either social or intellectual progress. Other forms of social maladjustment are daydreaming, extreme timidity, hyper-activity, defiance of authority, nervousness, poor motivation, frequent crying, excessive fears, masturbation, physical complaints, inertia, hysteria, lying, stealing, and delinquency.

Perhaps the single factor most commonly found in cases of social maladjustment is the high incidence of academic underachievement. In a study by Woody (12) comparing well-behaved boys with behavioral-problem boys, the well-behaved boys scored significantly higher in both reading and arithmetic achievement than did the behavioral-problem boys. Research by Bower (2) shows that the emotionally disturbed child ranks significantly lower than other children in the class, with the discrepancy between achievement and expectancy widening at each successive grade level. Since underachievement is a common characteristic of the child who has problems in social adjustment, the treatment of such a child merits very special consideration.

It should be obvious that any child with one or more characteristics of deviant behavior would be more difficult to teach than one who has no problems. However, instruction can seldom be suspended until the social problems are completely solved. The fact that children with problems often can learn to play complicated games, and memorize songs and slogans indicates that learning of some kind is taking place most of the time. Although most of the child's energies may be spent in the attempt to achieve his basic social-emotional needs (10), some academic learning can take place if adequate interaction with the teacher

is established. The increased self-concept which results from learning to read helps the child to establish identity and thus satisfy a basic need (5).

Reading for the Reluctant Reader

In recent years a tremendous amount of attention has been devoted to the teaching of reading. New materials have deluged the market; new and old approaches and techniques have been assessed; experimental programs galore have been and are being conducted. The majority of these new materials, techniques, and programs have dealt with some kind of uniqueness or variation in the stimuli or the manner of its presentation, and nearly all have assumed that the stimuli would be presented to children who would attempt to make a suitable response. The fact is that the majority of children are ready to become involved with a good reading program and do learn to read as expected. A few children cannot or will not accept and process the graphemic symbol, make the experiental association, and produce any sort of response (3, 6). Consequently, with these children, no materials, gadgets, or methods of presentation will work. The absence of meaningful effort on the part of the learner results in failure to learn. Thus, the child may prefer to endure passive failure rather than to risk the greater pain of active involvement and possible failure (7).

Attention must finally be focused upon the reluctant learner (4), for it is this pupil who has been the subject of much controversy and effort in the teaching of reading. As stated earlier, the majority of children will learn to read by whatever methods or materials are used in the classroom, and the learning itself will constitute an intrinsic reinforcement. However, the child who has problems which he cannot

solve, who has been and is unsuccessful in establishing identity, or who feels himself to be a failure will lag behind or fail outright to learn. Some other motivational ingredient must be supplied to induce such a child to involve himself, for to become involved is to risk further failure. Somehow, the consequences of failure must be reduced and the successes which do occur must be recognized and reinforced (11).

Success with a Summer Program

In a recent summer tutorial program which the writer directed for children with behavioral disorders, measurable success was achieved in reading vocabulary and comprehension by a combination of supportive tutoring and counseling, with behavior modification techniques used to increase motivation. Eleven pupils who were identified as exhibiting moderate to severe social problems were enrolled in a six-week summer program. College students in special education worked as tutors with the pupils on a one-to-one basis for approximately one hour each day, and counselors who had identified the pupils continued to see them one or more times each week. All pupils were pretested with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests for the purpose of determining level of achievement upon entry. Further diagnosis of word attack skills was done with the Gates-McKillop Reading Diagnostic Tests. Then a program was carefully worked out for each pupil, using reading materials which were selected to remediate specific deficiencies. All activities were designed to accomodate the pupil's own learning style and to reach objectives which were set up according to need and learning potential. Each tutor worked with a pupil on improving attitudes, habits, and social and academic behaviors. Reinforcement in the form of both tangible rewards and verbal praise was used to increase effort and performance.

Insofar as possible, failures were minimized and mistakes were ignored. Much of the work was done on a contract basis, with pupils helping to write contracts and working for goals within a definite time limit. At the end of the program, equivalent forms of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests were administered to all pupils. Individual scores, mean scores, and mean gains are shown in the following table.

GATES-MACGINITIE READING TESTS SCORES,
MEAN SCORES, AND MEAN GAINS

Subject	Age	Vocabulary		Comprehension	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
S_1	8	3.7	4.3	2.6	4.7
S_2	7	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5
S_3	11	4.6	5.0	4.7	5.1
S_4	8	1.8	1.5	1.6	2.1
S_5	8	1.7	2.3	1.4	1.6
S_6	10	1.7	2.2	2.1	1.7
S_7	11	2.6	3.3	2.6	2.7
S_8	10	4.1	3.3	2.7	3.7
S_9	10	4.1	4.4	3.6	3.1
S_{10}	9	3.7	4.4	2.3	3.4
S_{11}	10	1.9	2.2	1.4	1.7
Mean Scores		2.9	3.1	2.3	2.7
Mean Gains			.2		.4

A comparison of the pre and posttest mean gain scores shows that appreciable gains in reading achievement were made in both vocabulary and comprehension. Although social adjustment was not objectively measured, pupil enthusiasm and motivation for doing lessons remained high throughout the program, and tutors and counselors felt that considerable progress in social adjustment had been made. The success of the program was attributed to the procedures outlined below, which were adopted and adhered to faithfully during the tutoring sessions.

1. All pupils were fully accepted and respected regardless of behavior, attitude, appearance, or amount of work done.

2. Specific short-term and long-range goals were established for each pupil. The pupil either helped to set the goals or agreed that they were reasonable and possible for him to attain.

3. Positive reinforcement was given for both academic and social goals attained. Tangible rewards in the form of prizes were given for attaining weekly goals, and privileges and verbal praise were given for daily achievement. The tutor constantly maintained a supportive relationship with the pupil.

4. No negative reinforcement was used. The tutor evidenced no displeasure when goals were not reached or the pupil did not perform well. The only loss incurred by the pupil for not doing his lessons was failure to achieve his goal and the accompanying reinforcement.

5. A pupil was never in competition with anyone except himself.

Techniques for Classroom Instruction

Understandably, the classroom teacher could not be expected to attempt the intensive one-to-one tutoring which was carried out in this program. However, the techniques are sound and have proved successful.

These techniques can be adopted for use with problem children in the classroom and can be applied to the amount of instruction which it is possible to give. For instance, the child who exhibits both social and reading behaviors which are inadequate deserves to have these behaviors diagnosed. Unfortunately, professional diagnosis of social problems is not always available. The classroom teacher or special reading teacher may be able to diagnose a reading deficiency and set up a program of remediation but may not have the expertise to cope successfully with deviant social behaviors. This is an unfortunate fact of the situation as it exists today. For the classroom teacher who has a problem child and who has no available guidance and counseling person, the following suggestions are offered as methods which have worked with moderate to severely disturbed children whose reading level was far below capacity to achieve.

1. Accept the child fully (1). Respect him as a person and treat him with the same courtesy extended to all other persons. Include him in small group activities when possible and in the total group regularly. Respond positively to any acceptable comments or activities. Give verbal praise often for good behavior. Insofar as possible, minimize or ignore poor behavior. Avoid negative comments of all kinds. Avoid looks and gestures of disapproval.

2. Diagnose the reading deficiency in the following manner: First, find the pupil's instructional reading level by using an informal reading inventory constructed on the material which he is being asked to read. If he is making more than approximately five errors per one hundred words and failing to answer correctly six out of eight comprehension questions, the material should be changed immediately to a less difficult level. The child with behavior problems is already burdened

and is easily frustrated. Material which offers a challenge to the highly motivated pupil is too formidable for the insecure pupil. The instructional level should be no lower than 95 or 96 percent accuracy for oral reading and no lower than 75 percent for comprehension.

3. Set definite goals which are based on present achievement and reasonable expectation. Set a time limit for reaching each goal. For instance, if the pupil knows 90 basic sight words, set a goal of five new words to be learned by a certain time, and then five more, always keeping the requirement within reason to achieve without too much struggle. Set goals for the number of pages to be read and the number of sentences to be written and so on. When the goals are reached give positive reinforcement in the form of verbal praise and recognition. If goals are not reached do and say nothing (9).

4. Arrange a variety of purposeful activities designed to assist the child in reaching objectives. Activities should include silent reading for a purpose (comprehension), learning new words (vocabulary), oral reading (expression, building confidence), and some forms of simple written exercises. All activities should be within the ability of the pupil to accomplish without intense struggle, and should be of short duration, since both motivation and attention spans are apt to be inadequate for sustained study.

5. Use a variety of materials and approaches. The language master, cassette recorder, vocabulary cards, skills games, and trade books should be brought into use as needed. Develop oral communication by including the disabled pupil in discussion groups and drama. Plan for some peer tutoring, team reading, and choral reading experiences. Avoid all punitive measures and coercion measures for getting lessons done.

Conclusion

The pupil who has both social problems and reading problems needs help, not criticism. If the teacher understands that the troubled child cannot fully apply his energies to learning to read, and cannot complete his social-emotional adjustment as long as he has feelings of failure in reading, then the magnitude of the problem has been realized. Since the two behaviors are commonly found to be linked together, the treatment must take both into consideration. For the child who is inadequate in both social adjustment and reading achievement, progress in either area will almost surely mean a lessening of the problem in the other.

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