

Focus on Reading Diagnosis and Remediation

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Abstract


Children do not read at the same rate and there are those with adequate ability who have problems that delay or even block their learning to read. An effective reading program must include early diagnosis of the pupils' reading inadequacies, and careful evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses. The result of this evaluation will utilize the use of professionally designed materials and techniques in teaching reading. If it is a remedial reading class, the reading teacher's challenge is for the lowest achievers to read at average levels.

Keywords: diagnosis, remedial reading, lowest achievers, average levels

"At the beginning slow progress. Then suddenly the gap is filled. Sounds improve, and then oral reading ...comprehension...and desire to read increases."

N. A. Santos, *RAP Journal*, 94:12
from *A First Grade Teacher*, Hill, *RT*, 91:480

Strang, McCullough and Traxler (1967) write that many teachers recognize reading instruction as a major responsibility and that the whole school must ini-

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tiate, develop and improve its reading program.

The same writers point out that the reading program is like a suit. It must fit the learner. The learners vary in their reading needs so that the important role of a reading teacher is to provide for a continuous identification and immediate remediation of reading deficiencies and difficulties, if the need arises.

Smith and Dechant (1961) believe that a learner does not need reading remediation if he has a normal reading growth because the prereading period has provided him with experiences needed for learning to read such as auditory and visual discriminations and learning concepts; that progress in reading readiness has equipped him with mental maturity, satisfactory classroom adjustments, normal physical development, adequate background experiences and positive attitude toward reading, that his Grade I reading has equipped him with sight vocabulary for printed and written symbols for meanings in various situations in using these elementary techniques and clues for word identification; that at the end of Grade 3, he has marked progress in mastering word recognition techniques and other fundamentals of reading, possesses flexibility in the use of reading skills, has a sound basis for study-type reading, has greater speed in silent rather than in oral reading and has a positive attitude toward reading. This progress in the basic reading abilities makes the learner proficient in reading in the content area which is a very good foundation for reading in the higher grades.

When a learner does not have a normal reading growth, his reading difficulties, at its initial stage must be prevented. Bond (1961) writes that the learner must be placed into a thoroughgoing reading readiness program to prepare him for beginning reading and for reading at higher levels. Proper adjustment of reading instruction must be done to suit his needs so that he can go into a systematic developmental reading program. This learner is then placed into a remedial program.

Gates (1961) says that a remedial reading instruction is essentially the same as good classroom teaching but it is more individualized and the teacher works with the learner using the essential teaching methods. The teacher, however, concentrates on the skill on which the child is deficient. This is done after the learner undergoes a thorough diagnosis to find out his strengths and weaknesses in reading.

Bond (1961) writes that as the teacher finds out the learner's reading difficulties, he observes keenly the learner's reading growth and he studies the attainment of specific skills and abilities so that any faulty learning can be detected and corrected early. He gives each learner a material that is suitable to the individual

growth; and he uses teaching methods compatible to the learner's characteristics and capabilities.

An effective remedial reading teacher is prepared to adjust instruction to differences in reading because of the importance of reading ability in education and in the society and because learners with reading difficulties are not allowed to drop out of school but are expected to go on developing reading proficiency up to the level of his capabilities. An effective remedial reading teacher expects a range in the learner's reading ability; he also makes considerations in adjusting individual differences in reading using these instructional approaches: children are alike in many ways, such as they develop in ways other than in reading attainment; their development in reading is not always uniform; reading is a complex learning process; adjustments to the individual differences change through the grades, and to the type of reading being performed (Smith and Dechant, 1961).

Remedial reading becomes diagnostic teaching in the classroom if the teacher becomes aware of each learner's capacities, physiological condition, emotional and social adjustments, interests, attitudes, and general level of reading ability. The remedial reading teacher makes a continuous diagnosis of the skill development of each child and on the flexibility in instruction to meet the specific needs of the learner. He makes notations of reading characteristics that might limit reading growth and indicate visual difficulty, auditory limitation, negative attitude, or signs of fatigue. By knowing the results of all the appraisals, including the daily observations, the remedial reading teacher can modify his approach in order to adjust instruction which are divided into introductory, guided reading and follow-up phases (Bond, 1961).

During the introductory phase of teaching a selection, the remedial reading teacher gives the use of context clues more opportunities to select, from among the new words, those that fit the context. He gives more opportunities to work on the similarity of initial blends in known and unknown words; he discusses pictures and concepts for clarification of word meanings and for noting details. He may ask the learner to tell in one sentence what it was about or to write a title about what has just been read. In the guided reading and discussion phase, the remedial reading teacher calls upon the learner to relate some of the content of the selection. If there is a misconception, the teacher uses this instructional opportunity to correct the faulty reading, instead of calling upon another learner for the correct response. He helps the learner who made a mistake to find the page where the idea was presented to determine how the error came about in order to help the learner overcome the problem.

In the follow-up phase, the teacher has an unlimited scope in adapting to the individual needs of the learner. In the skill and ability exercises prepared by the teacher, the emphasis is placed where it is needed. In the skill development workbooks, the teacher may excuse the learner who depends too much on context clues from those exercises emphasizing their use. The word-by-word reader may be excused from word-drill exercises and be encouraged to prepare a conversational selection for reading aloud, stressing and reading the selection the way people talk.

Smith and Dechant (1961) write about the many reading problems such as general reading immaturity wherein learners are significantly behind in reading, compared with other children on their general reading expectancy. For remediation, the teacher gives the learner more experience in reading and gives systematic instruction at the child's level of reading achievement. There are also children with specific reading immaturity who have specific limitations in the reading patterns. These are learners who are able to understand the general significance of what has been read but not being able to organize longer selections. The teacher must give these learners instruction that involves specific training in the areas in which the learner is weak. Children with limited reading disability have serious efficiencies in their basic skills that limit their entire reading growth. For this kind of disability, the teacher introduces new approaches to reading through a well-planned, systematic remedial program in order to correct the faulty reading approaches. Children with complex reading disability, aside from having reading disabilities, also have negative attitudes toward reading and an undesirable adjustment to their reading failure. These children must be provided with a team of professionals who can provide these learners with a careful assessment to prepare them for an appropriate remedial reading program.

The causes of reading disability may be due to physical factors such as visual, auditory, and neurological impairment. Reading disability may also be due to cognitive and language factors such as intellectual limitations, cognition or process of gaining knowledge, cognitive style, semantic abilities, syntactic abilities, and phonological abilities. Another cause of reading disability may also be due to emotional, environmental and educational factors, such as personal and social adjustment, home environment, cultural or language differences, attitudes towards school, classmates and reading or school administrative policies, readiness for beginning reading, methods of teaching, role of the teacher or even role of the library or media (Bond, (1961), Smith and Dechant, (1961), and Maggart and Zintz, (1990).

Bond (1961) stresses that before the learner goes into a remedial reading program, he has to take tests. The characteristics of good diagnosis include the focus on improving the child's condition. It is efficient because it provides all essential information to remedy the learner's reading condition and uses information from cumulative records which are relevant. It uses standardized procedures when they exist or informal procedures in the absence of the standardized ones. It bases its decision on patterns of score which is ongoing and is therefore progressive.

There are three levels of diagnosis. The general diagnosis are appraisals made routinely for all children referred for special study. The specific diagnosis are the more detailed diagnosis made only when more analytical study is warranted. The child-study diagnosis are appraisals that are individual in nature which are made only in the most complex cases.

Some of the assessment procedures are the general achievement tests, analysis of classroom reading, informal reading inventories, informal diagnosis of word-recognition difficulties, informal diagnosis of comprehension difficulties and the standardized reading diagnostic test, if this is available.

The remedial reading becomes individualized when the reading teacher studies the learner's characteristics, focusing upon his specific reading needs using varied techniques and engaging in active learning. The reading teacher chooses the appropriate materials by selecting which are suitable in the level of difficulty and are of the proper type. He also enlists the cooperation of others such as the guidance counselor, the school nurse, classroom teachers, the parents and the learners themselves by involving them in the reading program (Kennedy, 1977).

Conclusion

The remedial reading program is one of the most challenging areas of reading. The most notable challenge for a remedial teacher is in making the learners who are the lowest achievers learn effective reading strategies to make them read at average levels (Santos, 1994).

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