Reading problems common to the slow learning child and their relationship to the acquisition of basic reading skills

Bernadette Hall

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd

Part of the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
Hall, Bernadette, "Reading problems common to the slow learning child and their relationship to the acquisition of basic reading skills" (1974). Master's Theses, Capstones, and Projects. 643.
https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd/643

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Stritch Shares. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master’s Theses, Capstones, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Stritch Shares. For more information, please contact smbagley@stritch.edu.
READING PROBLEMS COMMON TO THE SLOW LEARNING CHILD
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE ACQUISITION
OF BASIC READING SKILLS

by

Sister Bernadette Hall, S.S.N.D.

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
(EDUCATION OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED)
AT THE CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1974
This research paper has been approved for the Graduate Committee of the Cardinal Stritch College by

\[ \text{Sister Gabrielle Kowalczyk} \]
(Adviser)

\[ \text{Date} \quad \text{July, 1974} \]
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express sincere gratitude to Monsignor E. H. Behrmann, Director of the Department of Special Education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, for his friendly encouragement and his example of untiring dedication to his field.

Sincere thanks are also offered to Sister Gabrielle Kowalski who so generously gave her time, interest and helpful suggestions to the writer.

Grateful appreciation is offered to Mrs. Mary Appal who spent many hours and much care in typing this research paper.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.  <strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes of the Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Limitations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.  <strong>Reading and the Slow Learner</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Characteristics and Educational Needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Slow Learners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and the Slow Learner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Teacher’s Role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.  <strong>Summary and Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B i b l i o g r a p h y</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iv
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

During the last several decades our society has been in the grips of an age marked by a high regard for efficiency, and this trend will probably increase in scope and intensity as the years go by. Automation, speed, and computer-programming are only a few of the by-products of a technological world.

We humans almost seem to be in the way. Certainly we are out of tune with machines. Especially out of tune is the plodder, that child who doesn't snatch things out of thin air, remember, organize, and produce on call. It is not surprising, therefore that he tries the patience of many. Surely he serves as the plodder to our values. Do we believe in the dignity of man or in the dignity of the bright man? Do we aim for the finest education we can give to each child or the finest education to those who are the agile free-wheelers? Do we understand the handicaps of birth and environment over which children have no control—or do we act as if we blame them for being born to learn slower or being shortchanged by their homes and neighborhoods? The answers to questions such as these, which reveal that we actually live by, will determine the quality of our influence upon children who, when at their best, work far slower than most.¹

Even though genuine concern is expressed today over the difficult challenge of meeting children's individual differences, some teachers and school systems still harbor an unrealistic approach to the education of slow learners. The learning rates of these children are

often not accepted and attempts to bring them up to norms based on grade placement express rejection of their innate learning potential.

Over the years educators have had their own brand of pressures influencing them toward uniformity. Their efforts to bring and keep children up to the "norm" have not only shortchanged many bright children, but have also dimmed the sparkle in the eyes of the less bright. Although special classes are arranged and special materials and individual aids are provided for slower children, they are not accepted as individual persons with true dignity, ambition, promise, and power, all geared to their speed.

Because the development of reading skills is the foundation for a basic education in our society, slow-learning children must be taught these skills if they are to grow to be independent and competent citizens.

**Importance of the Problem**

The functional reading level of many slow-learning children is not commensurate with their mental age; but these children with reading disabilities are often overlooked.

... theories setting arbitrary I.Q. levels beyond which reading cannot be achieved, and implying psychological barriers inherent in mental retardation which presuppose failure in reading, may be a causal factor in this apparent lack of interest in the reading problems of the retarded.2

Any psychological differences among children of diverse

intellectual capacities, resulting in variation in patterns of reading achievement, should be analyzed.

The fact that the child is educationally retarded below his ability should indicate that the usual methods of teaching him are not successful. The first task is to find out some of the basic difficulties that the child is having, so that remedial work can be accomplished.\(^3\)

Often it is forgotten that the methods and materials generally in use are developed to meet the needs of the average child. While no one characteristic except slow mental development is found in the slow-learner, and while every other difficulty may be found in some intellectually average children, there are certain problems so common to this group that they provide a field for educational research and planning.

A controversy can be noted in the field of educating the slow learner. Some authors, such as Strang, McCullough and Traxler\(^4\) hold that procedures used in working with slow-learning students are not fundamentally different than the procedures used with average students. They believe the difference is chiefly in the rate of acquisition of skills. Other authors, such as Kirk\(^5\) state that the methods employed in teaching the slow-learning child must differ in many respects from the methods of teaching the normal child. Experts in the

---


teaching of reading such as Brueckner and Bond believe that modifications and adjustments in the usual instructional methods should be made for slow-learning children, without advocating an entirely different program. These modifications would have to be more in the nature of emphasis and compatibility of learning objectives with the child's capacity.

There is no more reason to expect that gifted, normally intelligent, and retarded children will all profit maximally from the same teaching methods . . . in reading than to suggest that both the blind and the deaf will profit equally from the use of visual aids.

Research in the area of reading problems of the slow-learner has thus far been sporadic instead of programmatic. Data about similarity and diversity in patterns of functioning among slow-learners would be valuable in planning future programs for the slow-learner.

Definition of Term

During the past thirty years, slow-learners have been referred to as borderline defective, dull normal and intellectually backward. Slow-learners are capable of achieving a moderate degree of academic success even though at a slower rate than the average child.

Due to variations in the definitions of the term "slow learner," different I. Q. ranges have been associated with this type of child.


7Laura Jordan, "Reading and the Young Mentally Retarded Child," Mental Retardation, 1 (February, 1963), 21.
In this paper the most commonly accepted I. Q. range of 75-90 will be associated with the label "slow-learner."

The incidence of dull normality, theoretically, according to the normal distribution curve would be 23.86 percent of a total population. However, this percentage varies considerably with the socio-economic status of the particular community. Johnson estimated the incidence of slow-learners to be between fifteen and eighteen percent of the population, but up to fifty percent in sub-cultural areas. In suburban, residential areas with a high population of executives and professional people the percentage of slow-learners is very low. Much depends upon the psycho-social stimulation within the family and the community environment.

---

A slow-learner with a reading problem is one who, because of discouragement and other factors, does not achieve, at or nearly up to, his mental age capacity in reading. Such a child may have a mental age of ten and a chronological age of thirteen, but still be unable to read.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper is to review the research that has been conducted on reading problems of the slow-learning child, in order that measures for remediation will be more readily undertaken and so that other implications may be drawn concerning the psychology and education of the slow learner.

Specific Objectives may be stated thus:

1. To review research concerning reading problems of the slow-learning child.
2. To relate general characteristics of the slow-learner to the acquisition of basic reading skills.

**Scope and Limitations**

This paper will review the sporadic studies conducted since 1940. There has been little follow-up or continuity of programming in the research studies reviewed in this paper. Further research in the area of reading problems of the slow-learner is suggested.

---

Evidence has been accumulating that it is not always a waste of time to teach reading to students with low scores on intelligence tests. Educators need to experiment with reading methods appropriate to students who have lower levels of intelligence than do those usually assigned to special reading classes. Different intellectual levels, such as that of the slow-learner, seem to have specific patterns of learning. If a child's difficulty has educational significance, then the educational program should be adapted to accommodate the difference. Instruction should be tailored to suit the needs of the educationally atypical child just as other adaptations are made for the benefit of physically handicapped children.
CHAPTER II

One of the most interesting facts about human beings is the uniqueness each achieves. There is no monotonous possible in human relations if one remains attuned to the many persons who form the myriad of contacts each individual makes daily. This is particularly gratifying in an age of standardized equipment and pressures toward uniform thinking that place premium on mediocrity.

The first requirement in dealing with the slow learner is for teachers, parents, and all who live and work with them to probe their own attitudes toward these children. Studies of slow, often-failed youngsters reveal unhealthy self-concepts, a sense of second-classness, a sense of defect and unworthiness. The school and home share in responsibility for helping them live successfully and satisfyingly, with a wholesome attitude toward themselves. Giving them select aids and attention in becoming readers is therefore essential in achieving these aspirations.

Learning Characteristics and Educational Needs of Slow Learners

Slow learning children differ from one another to a greater degree than they differ from children with an average rate of learning. When a group, as widely diverse as slow learners is typified by certain characteristics, allowances for conforming to these characteristics
will have to be made, not only between various children but within each child himself. No child having an I.Q. of 75 to 90 will be adequately, comprehensively or concisely described by any single set of established characteristics. However, inferences as well as indications can be drawn from the results of compiled research and observations concerning commonly occurring behaviors of many members of such a group of children.

Strong lists learning characteristics of educable mentally retarded children and other children with learning problems:

1. Poor performance on WISC sub-tests of Information, Coding, Arithmetic, and Digit Span but relatively high on Picture Arrangement and Block Design.
2. Poor auditory memory and other memory disorders; (unless the child is fully occupied with the task at hand and emotionally involved in it).
3. Inadequate concept formation.
4. Poor sound-blending ability.
5. Problems in right-left discrimination of parts of their bodies; e.g., disturbance in bodily orientation.
6. Inferior intersensory integration, e.g., matching visual with auditory patterns - visual dot patterns with auditory rhythmic tape in the same pattern (auditory-visual equivalence).
7. Erratic motor patterns.
8. Inability to write until after they have learned to read.
10. Inability to call up auditory or visual images.
11. Neurological disturbances.\(^1\)

---

Jordan has compiled an abbreviated list of psycho-educational characteristics interfering with learning in retarded children. These were also translated into their learning analogues. The following is a summary of Jordan's research:

1. Low performance on I.Q. tests designates a slower rate of learning than that of the average child.
2. Because retention of information is poor, over-learning and frequent review is required.
3. Language ability is deficient in number and complexity of concepts, in grammar, and in ideational content.
4. Learning which tends toward the concrete reveals greater difficulties in handling abstract material.
5. There is a lowered tolerance for frustration.
6. Short attention span has been developed through negative training or as inherent in the handicap.
7. Imagination and creativity are weak, leading to a predisposition to perseveration and resistance to change.
8. Due to perseverative tendencies in word, thought, or deed, there is relatively little spontaneous learning, making it necessary to include more common learnings in the curriculum.
9. There is a reduction in spontaneous learnings acquired outside of formal instruction. Transfer and generalization also occur less often and less spontaneously.²

Karnes has included several other educational characteristics of the slow learner that have not been previously mentioned. She has observed that the slow learner can ordinarily be expected to reach about seventh or eighth grade level only at an approximate chronological age of sixteen. This learning lag increases with age, and the slow learner gradually falls further and further behind his peers in academic areas. He has a more difficult time with cause-effect relationships, making inferences and drawing logical, valid conclusions. He responds to immediate goals rather than to delayed gratification and has to see a reason for the here and now.3

Some needs which flow from these learning characteristics have also been mentioned by Karnes. Slow learners need meaningful, experiences geared to their stage of development as well as opportunities to develop reasoning skills and meaningful associations. Here it must be emphasized that the quality of learning experiences should be given greater value than the quantity. Slow learners need more repetition and practice of skills. Learning imperative to current and future success and adjustment must be taught systematically and sequentially through careful planning. At first, activities should be chosen so that success is possible and the minimum amount of time is required for completion. Gradually the time span can be increased. The slow learner needs to practice language in describing firsthand experiences.

He needs a stimulating environment to increase vocabulary and encourage communication of ideas. Greater facility in the use of words will make thinking and communication more effective.4

Because the slow learner has less self-confidence and sense of adequacy, he needs immediate feedback for correct responses, more praise and encouragement, more tangible evidence of his progress. He needs counseling services, vocational guidance and warm, accepting teachers. He should be encouraged to develop creative abilities, especially in language and thinking; to ask more questions; to attempt to solve more problems; to express himself through art and music.

Comparisons of the slow learner's performance in various areas tend to pinpoint the most common deficits. Such deficits tend to depress other achievements and require special attention. When the persons to be taught are a handicapped group, decisions of inclusion and exclusion of special skills must also be made because of the restrictions of time and/or levels of mastery.

Again, it must be emphasized that the above characteristics and needs should serve merely as guidelines for identifying and educating the slow learning child. These are not meant to portray a comprehensive picture of every or any one slow learning child.

Despite their lower intellectual potential, slow learners are not a homogeneous group. Each has his desires, goals, skills and differences that make him a unique individual. Planning, programming for, and educating slow learners requires an individualized approach.5

4Ibid., p. 12
5Ibid., p. 14.
Reading and the Slow Learner

Our modern civilization demands more of the child than ever before and its demands are increasing daily. However, the very civilization which is increasing its demands is decreasing the opportunity which it offers the child for the very necessary experimentation with basic skills. 6

Even in our day, the recognition and remediation of reading disability in the slow learner is being neglected. If treatment-oriented objectives for this group are to be achieved, attention must be paid to their improvement in reading. When given remedial assistance, individually or in groups, these children improve measurably. "Individual treatment for the correction of reading disability can have a therapeutic effect; it helps to prevent social inadequacy and improve mental health and emotional stability; it satisfies some basic needs of these individuals." 7

In diagnosing the reading of slow learning children, mental age is not always a sign of the expected reading level of the child, nor does it necessarily indicate a child's capacity. Yet many children in special classes and in the regular grades are allowed to mark time without being taught to read because teachers believe them incapable. If this problem is ever to be solved, the child's strengths and capabilities must be built upon. It must be done on a continuing basis that guarantees the slow learner a complete satisfying educational experience through steady growth at his own pace in reading.

6Newell C. Keilhart, The Slow Learner in the Classroom (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1960), p. 15.

Reading has been defined as a process of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem-solving. Reading behavior consists mainly of four sequential steps: receiving communication, making discriminative responses to graphic symbols, decoding graphic symbols into speech, and getting meaning from the printed page. It requires a series of skills, such as adequate reception, discrimination between sounds and symbols, visual and auditory input, sequence, and expression of ideas in the form of meaningful communication.

Reading skills involve various combinations and different degrees of cognitive processes, such as: memory, identification, recognition, comparison, analysis, synthesis, classification, interpretation, discrimination, judgment, organization, generalization, evaluation, and application. These processes would relate practically to the basic reading skills of word attack, pronunciation, explicit understanding of and implicit meaning, use of context clues, location of information and main ideas, outlining, recognizing sequential order, identifying time-place and cause-effect relationships, relating details to a topic and parts to a whole, interpreting figurative language, making analogies, analyzing plot structure and reading for a specific purpose.

In applying cognitive processes to reading comprehension, Barrett describes the lowest level as literal comprehension, which

---


focuses on the recognition and recall of explicitly stated ideas and information. This includes locating, identifying and recalling details, main ideas, sequence, comparison, cause-effect relationships, and character traits. The second level is reorganization. This requires analyzing, synthesizing, and/or organizing explicitly stated information. It includes skills of classifying, outlining, and summarizing. The third level is inferential comprehension, which involves making use of explicitly stated ideas and information, intuition, and personal experience as a basis for conjectures and hypotheses. This includes inferring supporting details, main idea, sequence, comparisons, cause-effect relationships and character traits, predicting outcomes and interpreting figurative language. The fourth level is evaluation, which means making a judgment by comparing presented ideas with external criteria or internal criteria provided by the reader's experience, knowledge, or values. It deals mainly with judgment, and focuses on qualities of accuracy, acceptability, desirability, worth or probability of occurrence. The fifth level is appreciation, which involves all the previously cited cognitive dimensions of reading. It deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the reading upon the reader, and includes both the knowledge of and the emotional response to literary techniques, forms, styles, and structures. It also calls for identification with characters or incidents, reactions to the author's use of language and verbal interpretation of imagery.10

Previously cited characteristics of the slow learner imply deficits or disabilities in many of the above cognitive processes. Therefore, it can be inferred that the slow learning child will have certain problems in the area of reading. "Intelligence is highly related to reading ability and is directly responsible for much of the variation in children's achievement in reading."\(^{11}\)

Gallagher and Lucito compared intellectual patterns of gifted, retarded and average children. They supported the theory that different intellectual levels do have their specific patterns of cognitive functioning. The mentally retarded group's strongest scores were in the area of perceptual organization, while their poorest scores were in verbal comprehension subtests. This was almost an exact mirror image of the gifted group. Since verbal comprehension skills include information, similarities, comprehension and vocabulary, disability in this area would necessarily affect reading performance. These results also support observations that a retarded person does best on tasks where most of the elements necessary to solution are presented to him and when limited reorganization and association skills are required for success. The retarded sample population lack the stored information and experiences that are the intellectual strengths of the gifted. Gallagher and Lucito conclude that because of the dissimilar intellectual patterns of the average child and those of the retarded, different patterns of

Curriculum and methods should be employed.\(^2\)

Slow learners are limited in such capacities as comprehension, generalization, association, symbolization, judgment, comparison, and fluidity of thought. In general, their difficulty is more perceptual-conceptual, rather than purely perceptual. A slower rate of development in reading isn't necessarily a sure sign of reading difficulty if poor reading is a part of a more general limitation. Children who lack abstract, verbal intelligence cannot be expected to develop as rapidly in reading or with as much capability as the average child.

A recent study by Fuller investigated the relation of perception to reading difficulties, and found that perceptual-diagnostic tests could discriminate secondary types of reading disability, in which the cause is emotional impairment or other external influences, from primary types in which the cause is biological or endogenous. Primary reading disabilities, such as those of the slow-learner, were shown to be associative rather than perceptual. In this case, the word or letter form is perceived, but the symbolic significance is not grasped. The child sees letters correctly in their spatial organization but is unable to associate words with one another in a meaningful way to translate the symbols of written language.\(^3\)

---


In 1966 a research study was conducted by Donald Neville to determine learning characteristics of poor readers as shown on individual intelligence tests. On the Stanford-Binet poor readers did best on those items which involved visual and auditory memory of meaningful material and some reasoning items requiring little verbal production. They did most poorly on those items which involved defining words, abstract memory, and sentence completion. On the WISC, poor readers were significantly low in subtests of information, arithmetic and coding. Their higher performance areas were picture completion and picture arrangement.\textsuperscript{14}

Other studies have also found the performance I.Q.'s of poor readers to be higher than their verbal I.Q.'s. Reasons for this outcome could be divided into two separate, but not mutually exclusive categories: (1) disability stemming from lack of reading achievement; (2) a disability which predated the reading disability--basic or causal in nature. The former type reflects school learning and language deficits. The latter infers poor ability in deductive and incidental learning, and in cognitive processes of organization, discrimination and association.\textsuperscript{15}

Das has also compared patterns of cognitive ability in non-retarded and retarded children. His evidence suggests that the two groups

\textsuperscript{14}Donald Neville, "Learning Characteristics of Poor Readers as Revealed by the Results of Individually Administered Intelligence Tests," \textit{Readings in Reading II, Part I} (Newark, I.R.A., 1967) 554 - 558.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 558
may use distinct modes of coding information—the successive and the simultaneous. The nonretarded child seems to be following an enactive code, while the retarded child has an iconic (picture-image) code for transforming the information.\(^{16}\)

Authorities in the field have various views on the ways slow learning children differ from the average child in learning to read. Kirk observes that they (a) cannot be expected to begin learning to read at the chronological age of six, (b) learn to read at a slower rate, (c) become discouraged because of continual failure, (d) usually have poorer environmental and experiential backgrounds, reflected in language usage.\(^{17}\) Teaching reading to such a child should include re-establishing the child’s confidence, delaying reading beyond the age of six or until a sufficient mental age for reading has been attained, prolonging the period of each stage of reading to conform to the ability of the child, giving more repetitions in a variety of presentations, and using high-interest materials more in harmony with the child’s age and experience.\(^{18}\)

Bruckner and Bond state that slow learners differ from the norm in needing more immediate goals, set purposes and longer periods of readiness. They are less capable in handling abstract reasoning, in critical reading, in evaluating and interpreting beyond literal


\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 38.
statements. Therefore, emphasis should be placed upon factual reading to follow directions, more gradual introduction of vocabulary, rereading and review, more detailed and simplified explanations, more concrete illustrations and simulated experiences, guidance in generalizing and transfer of learning and more physical and motor activity in connection with reading.\(^{19}\)

In teaching reading to slow learners, Featherstone suggests simpler activities, clear and specific plans and continuity of experience. Careful teacher planning should include frequent demonstrations, extensive drill or practice and frequent evaluations of progress.\(^{20}\)

Smith and Dechant state that major adjustments must be made for the slow learner in the content of the developmental reading program and the rate at which he progresses through it. More time should be spent on phonetic and structural analysis, vocalization, word knowledge and mastery of simple comprehension skills. Pointing at the words being read is also encouraged as an aid to fluency.\(^{21}\)

Osborne has noted that some slow learners will not have formed the habit of seeing and interpreting the meaning of punctuation or of looking accurately at words from left to right. Other obstacles may

---


include an inability to understand concepts due to lack of experiences, vocabulary deficiency, inability to interpret punctuation or failure to demand meaning from reading.  

Ruth Strange believes that most slow learners require more steps in the learning process than the average child. She stresses a pre-reading program for such children. Before beginning formal reading instruction, they must be taught to listen and speak, be trained in visual perception, and taught to distinguish sounds and spoken words. Strange gives much attention to phonetic analysis and auditory discrimination.

Bond and Handlan infer that drill in rapid reading is unnecessary for the slow learner, because he is unable to comprehend rapidly. They hold that he does not necessarily need experience with different types of literature because he will use the same skills whether he is reading fact or fiction, prose or poetry.

Sister N. Seraphine Herbst studied specific patterns of functioning in the reading of mentally retarded children. They performed best in basic vocabulary skills, finding directly stated facts, following simple directions and determining title or topic. Poor performance was observed in abstract verbal concepts such as recognition of opposites and similarities, and in concept of time such as arranging events.

22 Vera Cook Osborne, "Reading Do's and Don'ts," Today's Education, LIX (March, 1970), 48.

23 Ruth Strange, "Out of the Classroom: Step by Step Instruction in Beginning Reading for Slow Learners," Exceptional Children LXI (September, 1965), 31 - 33.

24 Bond and Handlan, Adapting Instruction, p. 27.
in sequential order. The difficulty in determining opposites evinces a rigidity in thought functioning, because most of the subjects chose synonym rather than antonym. An inability to function in unfamiliar situations is denoted by low results using miscellaneous type faces and in the use of the table of contents and the index. Limited ability was seen also in problems involving reasoning, inferences and organization of topics. Common areas of difficulty in oral reading were omission of word endings, substitutions, and inability to combine sounds. Sister Seraphine suggests methods which capitalize on the strengths of the slow learner in order to mitigate as far as possible their weaknesses. Her proposed methods include:

1. The development of word recognition skills to the highest possible level will facilitate practice in comprehension skills.
2. Continued, planned experience in drawing inferences from directly stated facts helps develop limited capacity for reasoning.
3. Provision of locally used telephone directories, catalogs, newspaper ads, cookbooks, and practice in their use helps overcome weakness in reference skills in those areas where they are needed for living.
4. Sound blends and prefixes and suffixes should be taught using words already mastered as part of sight vocabulary.

In 1961 Lloyd Dunn conducted a study which compared mentally


26Ibid., p. 67.
retarded boys to normal boys in reading. He found the retarded boys to be inferior in the use of context clues. They also made more vowel errors and omitted more sounds. Yet he found no differences between the two groups in reversal errors, in handedness, and in mixed lateral preference. However, the retarded group had an excessive number of vision and hearing difficulties. They were also retarded in spelling and arithmetic reasoning. Dunn challenges the Basic Reader approach for this type of child.

A number of us have been taught that the phonic approach is completely inappropriate for the mentally retarded. What does the literature show us about the sound blending ability of the mentally retarded, a necessary prerequisite to the phonic approach? (They are as good as normals in the 8-10 mental age range.) What does the literature reveal about the ability of the retarded to use context clues, since this is a recognised word attack skill and in the Basic Reader Approach? (The retarded are very inferior in this attribute.)

A research project by Kathryn Blake investigated achievement in basal reading skills by mentally handicapped, normal, and gifted pupils on the primary and intermediate levels. The intellectual processes of associative memory and reasoning were also applied to reading skills. At both the primary and intermediate levels, the mentally handicapped and normal groups did not differ in initial level of acquisition of sight vocabulary. When observing the results of this study it can be noted that the retarded children on the primary level more closely matched the performance of the normal group than the retarded children on the intermediate level.

28 Ibid., p. 68.
On the intermediate level the normal group exceeded the retarded group in level of acquisition on six out of nine phonetic analysis skills. In structural analysis skills the normal group excelled in five out of seven skills. The normal group also exceeded the retarded group in seven out of ten dictionary skills. There was no difference between the two groups in level of acquisition of word function skills (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). However, in comprehension skills the normal group exceeded in ten out of fifteen skills. There was no difference in rate of acquisition between the two groups in phonetic analysis. In rate of acquisition of structural analysis the normal group exceeded in two out of seven skills. In rate of acquisition of dictionary skills the normal group performed above the retarded in three of the ten skills and reached the ceiling in one—identifying alphabetical sequences based on the first letter. The normal group exceeded in three out of eight skills of word function and in rate of acquisition of one of the comprehension skills, identifying main ideas implied in stories.²⁹

Some of the implications from this study formulated by Aaron are:

1. Mentally retarded can learn the skills of reading.
2. Pupils should be taught the skills at earlier ages.
3. Teachers should have higher expectancy levels.
4. Teachers should differentiate methods and materials in a way appropriate for the pupils' particular and motivational characteristics.

S. Secondary programs for mentally retarded students should give more attention to developmental reading. Bond and Tinker affirm that the possession of less than normal intelligence need not be a cause of reading disability if instructional methods are adjusted to the learning ability of the slower child. Each succeeding level in the developmental program should have more materials and more individualized guidance than is necessary with the normal child. The reading materials are the same as those used with regular pupils, but there is more of the material, and the instruction is more highly individualized and more intensive. "In short, the program for the slow learner is broad, detailed, simplified, and slow-moving."

The Teacher's Role

An extensive review of learning characteristics, reading problems and educational methods geared to the slow learner have been explained. Yet the most important factor in teaching reading to the slower child is the teacher. Different teachers attain differing degrees of success using various methods. Each teacher needs to consider his own personality and the kind of contact he makes with his class in working out his teaching method. If good rapport is established; if the teacher and the child trust each other, an atmosphere conducive to learning will be created.


32Ibid., p. 468.
In this atmosphere the child will more easily be able to take success and failure, praise and criticism in his stride. The teacher will be able to direct and suggest activity and work of value without feeling he is imposing enforced tasks. However 'free' the activities of the child, however apparently self-directed, they are determined to a greater or less extent by the conscious and unconscious influence of the teacher. This responsibility cannot be shelved as is sometimes attempted when children are forced to be responsible for their own work and activities without the aid of a teacher's suggestions. It is the duty of the teacher to see that the experiences gained in school are of value and have their place in a coherent scheme. Therefore, the teacher must first fit his reading method to his own personality and then adapt it to the developing personalities of the children. Instead of focusing on teaching a particular method, the teacher must devote his energy to teaching a particular child. The teacher must have a repertoire of reading methods at his disposal.

With today's added competence in the field of education, slow learners should have hope for more successful, happy, and constructive futures.

If the fact that some youngsters propel themselves more slowly and less academically through life is accepted, and if each of them is taught according to his depth of understanding and rate of catching on, and if he can say and feel secure: "I'm not so quick at some things, but I'm O.K."-then we have met the challenge.

Summary

Authorities in the fields of reading and special education, such Strang, Jordan, Karnes, and Kirk concur that slow learning children are

---


more like the average child than like each other. They cannot be ade-
quately or aggregately described by interpolated standards. Each child
must be identified, diagnosed, and remediated individually. However,
experts such as Kirk,35 Karnes,36 Strang,37 and Jordan38 concur on sum-
naries of possible learning characteristics.

Reading proficiency is contingent upon the development of cogni-
tive processes inherent in basic skills. Because slow learners are dis-
abled to varying degrees in the cognitive processes, usually they will
not be as adept in reading as the average child, nor will they be cap-
able of a high level of attainment in certain comprehension skills. Ev-
en though mental age is not the ultimate determinant of reading success,
studies have verified a high correlation between intelligence and read-
ing achievement.

Methods must be modified and adapted to the specific needs of the
slow learner and much attention must be devoted to the psychological
make-up and self-concept of such a child. Also, of prime importance is
the teacher's role in the education of the slow learning child. The se-
lection and adaptation of methods, the motivation, understanding and fu-
ture of the slow learner truly lie in the teacher's hands.

35Kirk, Teaching Reading.
36Karnes, "The Slow Learner."
37Strang, Reading Diagnosis.
38Jordan, "Reading."
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

In the past, the problem of effective reading instruction for the slow learner has been neglected and generally regarded as insignificant in comparison to other more emphasized issues in the field of special education. Trends have shifted from institutionalization of children with below average intelligence, to special schools, to special day classes. Now with current plans for mainstreaming educable mentally retarded and borderline children back into the normal flow of education, emphasis has turned to programmed instruction, itinerant teachers and resource rooms. To accommodate and develop the potentialities of each child within a school system much care and attention must be given to individual differences in style and rate of learning. And so, the slow learner emerges as an individual with distinct needs and disabilities.

Slow learning children are limited to varying degrees in the intellectual processes involved in reading. Because reading skills encompass many different combinations of these intellectual processes as well as a hierarchy of levels of proficiency, the slow learner can be taught to compensate for his weaknesses by building on his strengths. This must be accomplished on an individual basis, taking the whole person...
into consideration. The teacher should observe the effect of the slow learner's handicap not only upon the academic performance of the child, but also upon the physical, psychological, social and emotional aspects of his personality. If these areas are not given attention, an intellectual debility may become more far-reaching and handicapping than it need be.

Mildly limited intellectual capacity cannot be a valid excuse for failure in reading. Yet many slow learning children are not given the appropriate instruction which would enable them to read up to their mental-age and reading-grade expectancy. Their reading abilities can be developed to or near their maximum potential through a carefully planned program taught by a teacher who has a positive but realistic expectation of success. If slow learners are taught at an appropriate level of difficulty and as meaningfully as possible they retain learning as well as children with greater ability.¹

There is a question as to whether reading ability affects intelligence or whether intelligence affects reading ability. Cognitive processes and reading ability are definitely interrelated. Higher levels of reading attainment demand higher degrees of cognitive functioning; yet as one acquires greater proficiency in reading, certain intellectual areas become more highly developed. These areas are the ones measured by individual intelligence tests, especially through verbal processing.

Many difficulties faced by teachers in attempting to meet the

needs of the slow learner are due to the erroneous assumption that all pupils in a particular grade should achieve a uniform standard in reading. It is also generally assumed that if they are properly taught and if they put forth enough effort children will achieve at this specified level. This assumption has led to the selection of uniform methods and the expectancy of uniform learnings in the curriculum. A teacher who recognizes the unique learning style of each pupil is hampered by the inappropriateness of such an emphasis upon uniformity.\(^2\)

**Implications**

History proves that whenever teaching methods become inefficient, new methods are produced to meet different conditions. But the difficulties involved must first be clearly recognized before successful methods can be devised. Lazar states ten fundamental assumptions necessary for the development of reading programs for the educable mentally retarded.

1. that all methods and techniques are relative in time and space and are only a means to an end.

2. that the heterogeneous nature and range of abilities found in pupils identified and placed in special classes for the educable mentally retarded will necessitate an array of methods and techniques using a variety of materials.

3. that the teacher must realize that when progress is slow or ineffective the cause might not be centered in the child but rather in the teacher’s failure to control and manipulate critical variables in the learning situation.

4. that the special class teacher be able to differentiate between individual attention and individualized instruction.

5. that the teacher assume the role as a manager of learning and approach education as a science rather than an art.

---

6. that the teacher develop a paradigm or model that would facilitate understanding input, and control of various variables operating in the learning situation.

7. that feedback and various forms and kinds of evaluation are essential as part of a unified and systematic way for developing the reading curriculum and program.

8. that the teacher evolve a systems approach which will allow for scope and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and value development upon the part of both students and teacher.

9. that the teacher employ behavioral objectives as part of the daily learning plan.

10. that the special class teacher assume accountability for the production of learning as demonstrated by performance objectives.

Early reading instruction should be systematic. The slow learner is often handicapped in developing his reading skills because of changes in methodology. These unwarranted changes in methodology result from either the teacher's need to see success or from the fact that the slow learner may be taught by several teachers during the extended time in which he develops his basic reading skills. Consistency is extremely important in using a single method or in transferring elements from one method to another.3

Conclusions

Research on reading has not clearly demonstrated the superiority of one method over another. The phonic method has its advocates, while


others report success with varied methods. Some authorities hold that slow learning children follow the same style of learning as average children, but at a slower rate. Some hold that many adaptations, adjustments and modifications must be made in regular methods of reading instruction in order for it to be applicable and suitable to the slow learner. Still others believe that a totally different method must be employed in teaching the slow learning child.

It is likely that the teacher’s enthusiasm for a particular method is a determining variable. It is also likely that slow learning children can learn by various modes of presentation, provided the methods are presented systematically and enthusiastically.

Failure to develop reading potential in slow learning children is often due to parental and teacher attitudes which stereotype certain inadequate expectancy levels and inconsistent or haphazard instruction. Often a characteristic or effect of a handicap is mistakenly identified as the primary handicap itself. A method is inappropriately chosen as remedial before careful diagnosis is made. The teacher must select methods carefully, basing his choice upon the needs of the individual child and upon his own personality as well. Only by viewing the slow learner as capable, will the educator attain results. Only by understanding the role of education as the teaching of children, not the teaching of methods, will the teacher be actualizing his true profession. This is what believing in the dignity of man—every man—involves. Through adherence to this philosophy educators will be capable of gradually restoring the light to eyes which have become accustomed to the darkness of neglect and failure.
HEBIBIOGRAPHY

Books

Aaron, Ira E. "Learning of Basal Reading Skills by Mentally and
Mondently Handicapped Children." Meeting Individual
Needs in Reading. Edited by Helen K. Smith. Newark:
TCA, 1971.

Bond, Guy L. and Handlan, Bertha. Adapting Instruction in Reading
to Individual Differences. Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 1928.

Bond, Guy L. and Tinker, Miles A. Reading Difficulties: Their
Diagnosis and Correction. 2nd ed., New York: Appleton-

Bruckner, Leo J., and Bond, Guy L. The Diagnosis and Treatment
of Learning Difficulties. Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.,

Cleugh, E. G. Teaching the Slow Learner in the Special School.

Clyner, Theodore and Wulfig, Gretchen. With Skies and Wings:

Dechant, Emerald V. Improving the Teaching of Reading. Engle-


Featherstone, William S. Teaching the Slow Learner. New York:
Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1951.

Gaas, Rona. Guiding Children's Reading through Experiences. New

Gaas, Rona. Common Sense in Teaching Reading. Indianapolis: The
Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963

33


Articles


Neville, Donald. "The Relationship Between Reading Skills and Intelligence Tests Scores." The Reading Teacher, XVIII (1965), 257-263.


Microfiche

Unpublished Materials

Barrett, Thomas C. "Taxonomy of Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Reading Comprehension." Madison: Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, University of Wisconsin, 1969. ( Mimeographed.)
