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CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE OBSERVATIONS IN IDENTIFICATION
OF READING PROBLEMS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Reading inability was recognized as a cause of scholastic failure and the early recognition of reading difficulty seemed essential to successful school performance. Classroom teachers were in a position to observe symptoms of reading difficulty. A simple way of bringing their observations to the specialist involved in reading diagnosis was needed.

A review of literature indicated teacher observation was of prime importance and that reading difficulties were attributable to one or a combination of these causes: lack of reading skills, lack of language skills, circumstances, or poor learning behaviors. Reading disability was most often caused by a lack of basic reading skills.

A Classroom Performance Observations checklist was devised to be completed by a teacher who referred a child for a reading evaluation. It included: sight vocabulary, word attack, oral reading, comprehension, listening, language, initiative, identity, and motor skills. Purposes were: to bring teacher observations to the specialist; to make teachers aware of behaviors that show reading difficulty; and to cause the teacher to decide whether the child's problem was a lack of reading skills.

Reading specialists distributed the checklist to twenty teachers who had referred students to them and a checklist was completed for each student. Teacher reactions to the checklist included: it enabled the teacher to see the child's performance picture more clearly; it was time consuming; it gave teachers input into diagnosis; it made teachers aware of areas of difficulty; and most difficulties were due to a lack of basic reading skills.

The reading specialists considered the utility of the checklist and concluded: it was easy to use; it provided information that was otherwise difficult to obtain; it made teachers aware of behaviors that indicated reading difficulties and continued use could make it a training instrument; it made teachers part of a diagnostic team; and it could be made a part of the referral form for Helena Elementary Schools.

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

In thirty years of classroom and remedial teaching, the writer has observed that the most common single cause of scholastic failure has been the inability of students to read well enough to do the reading activities required of them or the extracurricular reading that they felt they wanted to do. Parents, too, have been concerned about this inability and the schools have received much criticism for their methods of reading instruction.

Spache (1966) identified the retarded reader as the one who was reading significantly below his capacity rather than merely below his grade level. Everything that has been discovered about children's learning has pointed to the importance of early discovery and correction of reading difficulties. Deschant (1968) recommended that each lesson should be diagnostic in order that the child's needs and difficulties as well as his assets and strengths could be used by the teacher to adapt instruction to the individual's reading development needs. Teachers have accepted this concept. Why is it, then, that there have continued to be so many disabled readers?

It is possible that we have used highly recommended methods and materials and assumed that they would accomplish what was needed. It is possible that we have been too concerned with grade level performance and based expectations on that. It is possible that we have not looked

for ways to prevent reading disability but have been more concerned with cures in remedial settings. Is it also possible that what has been identified as "the problem" has not been the problem at all but merely a symptom of inadequate or misdirected instruction?

An interesting comparison was made by Carrigan and Smith (1959:

6) when they stated:

Clinicians are like a small group standing beside a river full of drowning people. The victims are being swept seaward by the current of time. The clinicians can pull out a few, but the rest are lost. Few of the group are willing to go upstream to find out how the victims got into the river in the first place.

Anyone who has worked with a child who has been experiencing difficulty in reading has found that the teacher must indeed be willing to study the reading performance of the individual in order to determine why it has been considered unsatisfactory or how that victim has "gotten into the river."

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was that reading difficulties needed to be identified while they were yet minor but quite often the classroom teacher has not recognized them or realized their importance as a part of the puzzle of the child's difficulty in reading performance. Reading disability often began with minor inadequacies which seemed quite insignificant. These had a tendency to snowball until there was such an accumulation of half-met reading needs that the child became a

remedial case. Detecting simple inadequacies has always been considered one of the important responsibilities of the classroom teacher. In this way, the problems were dealt with while they were still minor; and if they were not able to be corrected by the classroom teacher, they were referred to a remedial teacher. Engelmann (1970) said that it was easier to prevent reading failure than to remediate it.

The purpose of this study was to examine what had been said by reading authorities about the identification of reading problems and the early stages of diagnosis. This information was used to devise a simple classroom performance analysis checklist to be used by the teacher to record reading and classroom behaviors which seemed to indicate difficulty in the area of reading. It was developed to bring valuable teacher observations to the reading specialist when formal diagnosis of a reading problem was begun. It was also hoped that there would be an accompanying benefit and that it would make teachers more aware of reading problem symptoms. In this way more corrective activities would take place in the classroom to prevent failure from occurring.

Need for the Study

In order that a student's reading problems could be more quickly discovered and corrected, there was a need for the teacher to become more adept in recognizing the causes of reading difficulties. Often a pupil referred to a reading specialist was identified only as a child with a reading problem. Both specialist and teacher needed to

consider what was required of the child in the area of reading, what he was able to do, what he was not able to do, and what the causes for his difficulties were. In this way, the most practical and efficient solution to his problem could be worked out in the shortest possible time. The classroom teacher saw the pupil in a variety of reading situations. For this reason the teacher should be able to bring valuable observations to the attention of the reading specialist. Through the use of a classroom performance observations checklist, the teacher could be helped to recall classroom performance and make an evaluation of it. It was not enough to say, "He can't read. He has a reading problem."

There was a secondary hope that the use of the checklist would make the teacher more aware of the symptoms of developing problems. In this way, action could be taken immediately in the classroom and other children would possibly be spared from "getting into the river" of reading disability with its accompanying frustrations.

General Procedures

The study included a review of related literature and research from the library of Montana State University pertaining to the identification and preliminary diagnosis procedures of reading disability. It included ERIC publications from the year 1970 to 1974 and books and periodicals found in the professional library of School District No. 1 in Helena, Montana.

A classroom performance observations checklist was to be

developed from the information received from the review of literature. Care was taken to make it clear, concise, and to include those observations that could come only from the teacher who had observed the child in classroom interaction for at least six weeks. The checklist was scanned and discussed by three reading specialists. Appropriateness and utility of the checklist were considered. The checklist was then given by the reading specialists to twenty teachers who had referred students to the reading specialists for diagnosis of reading problems. The results of the utilization of the checklist were reported to the reading specialists by the teachers in conferences. The effectiveness of the checklist was then considered by the reading specialists.

Limitations

This study was conducted for the purpose of examining methods which have been considered by reading authorities to be valid and valuable for use by classroom teachers in the identification of the child with a reading problem. This information was then used to design a simple classroom performance observation checklist to be used by teachers referring children to reading specialists for diagnosis of reading problems.

Participation in the study was limited to twenty teachers and three reading specialists working in the Helena Elementary Schools during the school year 1974-1975.

Definitions of Terms

Reading specialist. That person who (1) worked directly or indirectly with those pupils who had either failed to benefit from regular classroom instruction in reading or those pupils who could have benefited from advanced training in reading skills, and/or (2) worked with teachers, administrators, and other professionals to improve and coordinate the total reading program of the school.

Identification. The determination of a student's reading status. It was not concerned with the nature of the problem, but indicated that a problem did exist.

Diagnosis. The process of defining the nature of the individual's reading problems and the conditions which caused them.

Retarded reader. One who was reading significantly below his capacity rather than merely below his grade level. He was retarded in a number of reading skills by one year or more, if in the primary grades; and by two years or more, if older, below that reading level which was considered necessary for him to participate in the reading tasks of his age group.

Developmental reading instruction. Characterized by starting at the instructional level of the child, helping him to proceed at his own rate, and following a sequential series of reading activities.

This type of instruction was done in the classroom by the classroom teacher.

Corrective reading instruction. Included the characteristics of developmental instruction when immediate diagnosis indicated a need for corrective help to eliminate gaps and minor deficiencies in skill development. It was given by the classroom teacher in the regular classroom.

Remedial reading instruction. Included the characteristics of developmental instruction and was used with retarded or disabled readers. It included intensive diagnosis and special tutoring. It occurred usually outside the classroom setting.

Adapted reading instruction. Included the characteristics of developmental instruction but with alteration or adaptation of the pace and expectations in view of the limitations of slow learners.

Summary

Reading inability was recognized as the most common cause of scholastic failure in today's schools. It was felt by the writer that the need for early recognition of reading difficulties was of great importance. Classroom teachers had the opportunity to observe pupils' reading behavior in many classroom settings and activities, and their contributions were seen to be of great importance to a reading

specialist concerned with the diagnosis of a reading problem. A simple checklist on which classroom performance observations could be recorded was developed for use by teachers who were referring students to a reading specialist for a reading evaluation. This instrument was to be used by twenty teachers.

The first step in this study was to review related literature and research. This is found in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

One of the major causes of failure in the schools of today was seen by the writer as the inability of many students to read well enough to do the reading activities required of them in the school setting or the personal reading which they wanted to do. Many of the serious reading problems could have been prevented if minor difficulties had been identified early so that they could have been corrected before they became disabling. Deschant (1968) stated that most remedial cases had been caused by the accumulation of unmet reading needs and that the reading deficiency had begun with simple inadequacies which had increased until the child was retarded in reading.

Recognition and detection of reading difficulties had long been considered the responsibility of the classroom teacher since it was the teacher who was in the best position to observe problem areas in the student's reading development. Teachers saw students more often and in a greater variety of reading situations than anyone else and were therefore in a position to observe symptoms of reading problems which were valuable in identification and diagnosis whether the diagnosis was to be completed by the teacher or by a reading specialist. For this reason, the teacher had to be made aware of some of the danger signs. Spache (1973) was concerned by the lack of emphasis on the value of observation in the diagnosis of pupil needs and stated that reading

methods courses should have stressed its importance. Input from the classroom teacher was seen to be of prime importance.

Strang (1964) believed that observation was of more value in discovering reading difficulties than was testing. The more able the classroom teacher was in observing problem areas in reading, the fewer children needed remedial help. The oral reading of the child gave the teacher the opportunity to observe his skills in word recognition, pronunciation, phrasing, and expression. The student also gave clues to his attitude toward reading by whether he sat straight or slouched, whether he was eager to participate or paid little attention. If the child substituted words in a sentence, he gave clues regarding his abilities. If the substituted word was incorrect, but made good sense, he probably comprehended what he was reading. If it made no sense, he was merely saying words with no understanding or regard for meaning.

The skillful teacher noted strengths and weaknesses during silent reading which could be tabulated and summarized. Some of the things which indicated difficulty in reading were: frowning, lip movement, finger pointing, inattention, and wandering from the task at hand. Discussion following the reading provided the opportunity to check comprehension and the ability to apply what had been read. A private conference with the pupil was recommended to reveal more specific information about his vocabulary, word recognition, and comprehension skills. Observation of what the pupil did with free time revealed

much about his initiative and self-direction. Strang (1964) stated that a listening comprehension test often gave an estimate of reading capacity as good as, or sometimes better than, an intelligence test.

Another responsibility of the classroom teacher was to recognize when a reader was so disabled that he needed greater help than that which was provided in the classroom. Since students were always growing and changing, observations which had been made during the previous years might not describe the present reading performance so a constant diagnosis was desirable according to Strang (1964).

In a survey of the methods used in identification and diagnosis of those with reading problems, Witty and Brink (1965) found that teacher observation was very important in discovering attitudes toward reading; discovering the nature and extent of reading interest and activities; and the discovering of interest, hobbies, and sports. All of these proved to be useful in motivation for the correction of reading problems.

The findings of six reports on case studies of pupils with reading problems were summarized by Chall (1967). The studies had been made by William S. Gray in 1922, Arthur I. Gates in 1922, Marion Monroe in 1931, Samuel Orton in 1937, Grace Fernald in 1943, and Helen Robinson in 1946. These authors agreed that lack of interest in reading and in schoolwork were the results and not the causes of reading difficulty. Specific reading problems such as poor comprehension and slow rate were

noted as the lack of the skill of decoding. Teachers who observed disinterest and poor comprehension were advised to observe further to see if the fault was not one of decoding. A simple individual comprehension test, that was suggested, involved the reading of a paragraph by the child who then answered questions about it. After that a similar paragraph was read to the child by the teacher, and again he was questioned on the content. The number of correct responses on the first reading indicated his reading level, and the second gave his potential level. If the level of comprehension was significantly higher on the second paragraph, the problem was one of decoding.

Teacher observation in the identification and primary diagnosis of the child with reading difficulties was considered highly important by Wilson (1970). He suggested several areas that he felt were important in making identification of readers with problems. These included: the child's reading strengths as well as his weaknesses; his ability to work effectively in group activities as well as his ability to work alone; both oral and silent reading ability; his performance in pencil and paper activities; and his ability to work independently as well as to work under teacher direction and supervision.

Vandiver (1972) stated that the ignoring of non-responding behavior in the early stages of reading accounted for many reading failures. Though nonresponse was sometimes caused by timidity, it was more likely to be caused by an inability to understand or to perform the

required task. The student chose not to become involved and risk failure. If it worked for him, he repeated the behavior until it became a habit. In this way the student was not involved in the process, so he was not motivated and learning was not taking place. While this type of behavior was significant, it was also comparatively easy for the teacher to observe.

Deschant (1968) felt that the teacher needed to become more expert in reading the causes of reading disability. Continuous identification of problem areas were considered necessary since small problems needed to be identified and corrected before they became disabilities. The things that needed to be considered were much the same as those mentioned by many of the other reading authorities and included: the things that the child could do, those areas where he experienced difficulty or failure, and a consideration of the possible causes of his problems.

That poor readers often used many devices to call attention to the fact that help was needed was observed by Robbins (1964). Some children became aggressive and put up a bold front; some disfigured their books and papers; some became belligerent and defiant; while others resorted to cruelty, destruction of property, and theft. Some children resorted to withdrawal from classroom activities and sought satisfaction in areas that seemed to them to be easier to cope with. These included: losing the place in the book; losing the book itself

or a pencil; letting the mind wander so concentration could not take place; appearing so sensitive and nervous that he bit his nails, blinked his eyes, or jiggled his knees; eating crayons, pencils, or erasers; repetition of words or phrases or stuttering; blushing a great deal or appearing embarrassed; a tendency to weep too often, too easily, and over unimportant things; excessive concern about the behavior of others; quarrelsomeness; fear of many things; and excessive and self-righteous goodness, noisiness, or shyness. All of these were behaviors that the teacher could not fail to notice since they were so disruptive. They were also behaviors that very possibly could not have been thought to be related to reading difficulty and it is possible that sometimes they were not. They indicated problems of some kind, however, and as such should have been followed up with more study and diagnosis.

Holt (1964) expressed the opinion that it was not possible to evaluate a child's performance by looking at him only once, and that once being when he was called upon to recite. Observation over longer periods of time needed to occur. In order to fairly evaluate his performance, these needed to take place when he was engaged in independent study and recreation activities, as well as when he was completing written assignments and taking part in oral reading and recitation. He further stated that concern had often been expressed by teachers because students had not asked for help with the things which they did not know. He felt that the real problem was making the students aware of the

difference between what they knew and what they did not know. He also felt that schools had given so much encouragement and praise to those students who were "producers" and who were able to give the correct answers by any or by all means that "thinkers" had been discouraged and turned off when no one waited for their contributions, listened to them, or considered their questions and concerns. The things that Holt mentioned were more difficult to observe and things that the average classroom teacher had probably not been made aware of, but they were important in the identification of the child with problems. Failure to find the area of difficulty often created other problems as the student began to doubt the value of his contributions and lost his good self-image. In this way he became an in-school dropout.

Engelmann (1969) stated that all of the children who failed in school had one thing in common. These children were the products of prior teaching which had failed and they had not learned those skills essential to school success. He strongly felt that it was the responsibility of the teacher to identify the specific skills which the child knew and those which he did not know, so corrective work could be done on the child's skill performance. He believed in working on the problems that existed and was not concerned with the child's history or his home, since nothing could be done about these by the school. He indicated that he was not too concerned with whether the child understood what he read in beginning reading. His main concern was that the child could

read the material, because he would first have to read the material before he could possibly understand it. He felt it was most important for the child to know the subskills involved in word identification.

Engelmann (1969) believed that it was important for the teacher to observe the frequency of appropriate responses made by the child as well as inappropriate responses. If the child responded appropriately, it meant understanding, involvement, and motivation. It was also considered important to carefully observe inappropriate responses to determine whether they indicated lack of understanding of the subject matter or whether they were made to get the attention of the teacher or approval, admiration, and reinforcement from the peers. Responses of this type decreased attending and consequently learning. He felt that observations of this type could save many children from special classes, school failure, becoming dropouts, and ignorance.

Spache (1973) expressed the belief that at the bottom of each reading failure was the contributing factor of a teacher's inability to recognize the pupil's peculiar needs or the inflexibility to adapt instruction to those needs. He suggested the use of the teacher-pupil conference for the observation of significant reading behaviors. In these, observation of the word attack skills, comprehension, and fluency occurred. The use of informal reading inventories was recommended for use in these conferences to establish the capacities for independent reading, estimate the potential level, and evaluate reading skills.

Spache also named two personality traits which hampered reading success but which could be easily observed. The first was excessive dependency in which the child needed constant encouragement, showed anxiety in a reading situation, and asked for assistance almost constantly. The second was poor attention qualities and a lack of initiative and persistence.

Smith (1970) observed that the student who had reading difficulties was easily identified by the teacher because he avoided reading activities as much as possible and received better grades in subjects that did not require so much reading. Smith felt that observation was a basic technique which required no extra time or materials and was employed every day by every good teacher. Though observations were not usually recorded, they were used to help the students. He recognized the limitations of observation which was excellent for understanding the manner in which a student read even though it failed to tell why he read that way. He further noted that observations made by the teacher might possibly tell more about the teacher than about the student. The teacher's philosophy of education, his personal opinion of the student, and his knowledge of a subject might very well influence what he saw. Suggested areas for teacher observation included: methods of word attack, word recognition problems, phrasing, comprehension, vocabulary use, language abilities, sentence structure, sense of humor, appreciation, attitudes, and creativity.

Heilman (1967) referred to the value of continuous diagnosis by the alert teacher. Since no child revealed all there was to know about his reading in any one sampling of his reading behavior, something new might be learned about him each time he read. And isolated observation might in itself be valid, but it was the sum of many observations and their relationships which produced the total picture of the child's reading performance.

One reason for close observation was so that no child would experience repeated failure and frustration with reading activities that he did not understand and could not do. Procrastination, daydreaming, and loss of interest were observable signs of fear of failure. Sometimes a child had lost, or never gained, confidence in his own ability to achieve in school. He revealed this by failing to complete tasks set for him and also by becoming very dependent and unable to work alone. Heilman (1967) recommended, also, careful monitoring of language facility. Concentration span and attitude toward reading were other areas that should be carefully observed.

It was the opinion of Zintz (1972) that the classroom teacher must assume the responsibility for the identification of students with reading problems, work for early detection and maximum prevention, but also know when to call for help when the techniques at his command proved to be inadequate.

Areas that had direct effect on a child's learning included not

only his intelligence and his acquired reading abilities but also physical factors, as well as social and emotional factors that hampered successful adjustment to the school setting. Difficulty in reading was sometimes shown by expressed boredom, lack of self-motivation, and failure to become involved and contribute to group efforts.

Smith (1970) observed that the student with reading problems could easily be identified by the classroom teacher because he avoided reading and got better grades in subjects that did not require reading. Observation was a basic technique which required no extra time or materials and was employed by every good teacher daily. Even though observations were not recorded, they were used by the teacher in helping the student. He recognized the limitations of observation. It was excellent for understanding the manner in which a student read even though it failed to tell why he read that way. Suggested areas for observation included: methods of word attack, word recognition problems, phrasing, comprehension, vocabulary, language abilities, sentence structure, sense of humor and appreciation, attitudes, and creativity.

Smith (1970) stated that the teacher occupied an important position in the discovery or identification of reading difficulties while they were minor so they might be corrected before they became critical and crippling reading problems. The classroom teacher needed to work in closer cooperation with the reading specialist, since it was

impossible for one to work effectively without the other in helping children overcome reading difficulties. The classroom teacher had to deal with the reality that a teacher did not have the time or the tools to carry out a complete clinical diagnosis, so a referral to the specialist needed to be made by the teacher.

Glasser (1969) expressed the opinion that two feelings were vital to success in school. One of these was the feeling of self-worth. This came to the student as a result of feeling successful in learning to think and in solving the problems which came to him in his school experiences. Continued success increased his self-confidence.

The other feeling was the social responsibility of being able to love others and receive their love. This developed the motivation to achieve and to feel that existence was worthwhile.

Love and self-worth were so intertwined that they were properly related by Glasser through the term identity. If the student was unable to develop an identity through love and feelings of self-worth, which came from classroom achievement, he proceeded to establish an identity through other pathways. Quite often these were nonresponse and withdrawal from interaction with his peers in the classroom. More often than not, delinquency followed.

Traits such as the presence or absence of love, the acceptance of others, being accepted by others, and the feeling of self-worth were easily observed by the perceptive teacher. Frequent failure to achieve, withdrawal and nonresponding behavior were even easier to observe.

Summary

The review of related literature and research indicated that the value of teacher observation in the identification of children with reading problems was of prime importance. It indicated to the writer that a child's difficulty in reading could be attributed to one or a combination of these causes:

1. A lack of basic reading skills. This included the lack of an adequate sight vocabulary, inadequate knowledge of word attack skills, and the lack of comprehension of what was read. Most reading disability seemed to have its source in this area.

2. A lack of language skills. This included difficulty in following oral and written directions and also in oral and written expression. Because of his lack of language skills, the child had not understood what was required of him. He failed to do the work that was assigned to him or did it in an unsatisfactory manner. It also caused him to sit as a nonresponder in a classroom discussion. This eventually became a habit. Because he was not involved, he was not motivated and eventually he became an in-school dropout.

3. Conditions and circumstances. This included sight and hearing problems, auditory and visual perception difficulties, speech problems, lack of fine motor skills, and many absences from school.

4. Poor learning behaviors. This included disinterest, as well as a lack of initiative and self-motivation. It resulted in non-responding behavior, withdrawal from classroom activities, and a poor

self-image or identity. Quite often poor learning behaviors were the result of one or a combination of the previously listed causes of reading difficulty.

These four causes were easily observed by the skillful classroom teacher. The teacher was able to contribute information about the child that would not have been available from any other source.

The review of literature showed a need for close cooperation between the reading specialist and the classroom teacher. Through careful observation the teacher had obtained valuable information about the reading and classroom behaviors of the child which was of great value to the reading specialist in the diagnostic procedure. The classroom teacher also had to deal with the reality that neither the time nor the tools to carry out a complete diagnosis were available to the teacher. For this reason a referral to a reading specialist was necessary but the contributions of the teacher were needed in the diagnosis. This made the reading specialist and the classroom teacher a team. The welfare of the child with reading difficulties became their mutual concern, and the team effort made the possibility of correction or remediation more feasible.

The next step was to develop a classroom performance observations checklist to be used by teachers who referred children to a reading specialist for diagnosis of reading problems. This is found in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

DEVELOPMENT OF A CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE OBSERVATIONS CHECKLIST

The writer felt that observations of classroom reading and non-reading behaviors often revealed symptoms of reading problems. These were considered of special value to a reading specialist to whom a child had been referred for a reading evaluation, but quite often this information was not available. Teachers had not recorded these behaviors. Many times they had not recognized them as being of value. A way to record and report these observations was needed.

The Classroom Performance Observations checklist was developed to be used by teachers who referred children to a reading specialist for diagnosis of reading problems. The first purpose of the checklist was to bring the observations to the attention of the specialist so that they could be used by that person to see a more complete performance picture. The use of the checklist caused the teacher to become an involved co-worker in the preliminary diagnosis of the child's problem. The second purpose was to make teachers more aware of behaviors that indicated reading difficulty. A third purpose was to cause teachers to evaluate the child's performance and make a decision as to whether the problem was basically a lack of reading skills or not. Involving the teacher in the process brought about motivation to either provide necessary corrective help for the child, or to reinforce the remedial help prescribed by the reading specialist.

In developing the checklist, several areas of classroom performance were considered. Included were: the ability to use sight vocabulary, the ability to make use of word attack skills, manner of oral reading, comprehension of material read by the child, comprehension of material that was read to the child, ability to use language orally, ability to use language in writing, initiative and self-motivation, identity or self-concept, behavior, and fine motor skills. At the end of the checklist, the teacher was asked to make a decision as to whether the problem was a lack of necessary skills or not a problem of skill deficiency (see Figure 1, page 25).

The appropriateness and utility of the checklist was approved by three reading specialists. These specialists then distributed the checklist to twenty teachers who had referred students to them for reading evaluations, and a checklist was completed for each referred child. After the completion of the checklist, the teacher met with the specialist in a short conference to evaluate the usefulness of the instrument. A conference was chosen for the evaluation rather than a questionnaire, because the writer felt the teachers would give more spontaneous and honest answers in this way. The questions the classroom teachers were asked to consider included:

1. Did you feel that the questions you answered gave information that would be of value to the reading specialist in the diagnosis of your student's reading problem?

Reading Activities

			Does he have an adequate sight vocabulary?
			Does he have adequate word attack skills?
			Does he read fluently?
			Can he answer questions about what he has read?
			Can he answer questions about something that is read to him?
			Is he interested in reading for pleasure?
			Can he express his thoughts and ideas orally?
			Can he express his thoughts and ideas in writing?
			<u>Non-reading Activities</u>
			Does he complete assignments?
			Does he take pride in good performance?
			Is non-performance rewarding to him in status or receiving attention?
			Is he able to work independently?
			Is he able to work in a group?
			Can he understand and follow oral directions?
			Can he understand and follow written directions?
			Does he learn new routines and activities without much effort?
			Does he like to experiment and try new things?
			Is his handwriting legible?

Name of child	Name of Teacher
---------------	-----------------

Figure 1.

2. What were your reactions to the questions that you answered?

3. Did you feel that this checklist was of any value to you, and would you be willing to use it again with another child?

The reactions of the twenty teachers to the checklist were then considered by the reading specialists to determine the effectiveness of the checklist.

Three teachers indicated that at first they felt incapable of answering the questions. They felt that there were desired factual answers that they should be able to give. When reassured that only their honest opinions were desired, they completed the checklist. Each respondent mentioned giving much thought to the answers they gave, so the process was more time-consuming than had been anticipated. All but three teachers felt that the experience had been of value to them, since it had caused them to consider the total classroom performance of the child and had enabled them to recognize areas of difficulty. Seven teachers mentioned specific areas of difficulty of which they had become aware. These included: lack of listening skills, lack of sight vocabulary, difficulty in word attack, and non-performance as an attention-getting device. These seven teachers indicated that they were able to begin corrective work in these areas immediately with some guidance from the reading specialist. Eighteen teachers decided that the reading difficulty of the children they had referred was basically a lack of reading skills. One teacher asked that her referral form be returned to

her. The checklist had convinced her that the child's problem was not one of reading but one of behavior which she felt capable of changing with a behavior modification program. Each of the twenty teachers felt that the information which they had provided was of value to the reading specialist in diagnosing and prescribing and they were pleased to have had the opportunity to provide it. All expressed a willingness to use the checklist with other children which they would refer for a reading evaluation.

The reading specialists considered the reactions of the twenty teachers and evaluated the instrument. They found that it was clear, concise, easy to use, and provided them with information that was of value in diagnosis of a reading problem. This information had previously been difficult to obtain without arranging a special interview with the classroom teacher who had referred a child for a reading evaluation. The use of the checklist made the teacher a part of a diagnostic team, and this was considered to be highly desirable. It made the teachers more aware of behaviors that indicated reading problems. One reading specialist indicated that it was a good training instrument, and its continued use would be a reminder to teachers of the symptoms of reading difficulties. One specialist suggested that the Classroom Performance Observations checklist should be made a part of the regular referral form used in the Helena schools.

The reactions of the twenty teachers and the evaluation by the

reading specialists indicated that the three purposes of the Classroom Performance Observations checklist had been met, and that it was an appropriate and useful instrument.

Summary

Observations of classroom reading and non-reading behaviors by a skilled classroom teacher often revealed symptoms of reading difficulties. While these were valuable in the diagnosis of a reading problem, they were often not reported to the reading specialist who was making the diagnosis. A way to record and report these observations was needed.

A Classroom Performance Observations checklist was devised. This was to be completed by the classroom teacher who had referred a child for diagnosis of a reading problem. It included these areas of classroom performance: the ability to use sight vocabulary, the ability to use word attack skills, manner of oral reading, comprehension of material read, listening comprehension, language skills, initiative, identity, and fine motor skills.

Three purposes for the development of the checklist were considered. These were:

1. To bring the teacher's observations to the reading specialist so that they might help in diagnosis.
2. To make teachers more aware of behaviors that indicated reading difficulty.

3. To involve the teacher in making a decision as to whether the child's problem was basically a lack of reading skills.

The checklist was found to be appropriate and useful by three reading specialists who distributed it to twenty teachers who had referred students for reading evaluations. A checklist was completed for each referred child and the teacher met with the specialist in a short conference to evaluate the utility of the instrument. The teachers were asked to consider three questions. They were:

1. Did you feel the information which you gave was of value to the reading specialist?
2. What were your reactions to the questions?
3. Did you feel that the checklist was of any value to you, and would you be willing to use it again?

The reactions of the twenty teachers were then considered by the writer and the three reading specialists in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the checklist. The reactions included:

1. Each teacher mentioned that the questions were thought provoking and helped her to see the child's total performance picture more clearly.
2. The process was more time consuming than had been anticipated.
3. All of the teachers felt that the information they had contributed was important, and they were pleased to have been able to provide it.

4. Seventeen teachers felt that the experience had been of value to them since it had enabled them to recognize areas of difficulty.

5. Seven teachers mentioned finding specific areas of skill deficiency and each expressed confidence to begin corrective work with guidance from the reading specialist.

6. Eighteen teachers decided that the reading difficulty of the children they had referred was basically a lack of reading skills.

7. One teacher decided the difficulty of the child she had referred was not one of reading and withdrew the referral.

8. The twenty teachers expressed a willingness to use the checklist again.

The reading specialists then evaluated the effectiveness of the instrument and found:

1. It was clear, concise, and easy to use.
2. It provided information that was helpful to them and that would have been hard to obtain in any other way.
3. It made the teacher aware of behaviors that indicated reading difficulty and could be used as a training instrument for teachers.
4. It made the teacher part of a diagnostic team.
5. It worked well with the referral form and should be made a part of it.

It was concluded that the Classroom Performance Observations

checklist was an appropriate and useful instrument.

Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Reading inability was recognized as the most common cause of scholastic failure in today's schools. There was a need for the early recognition of reading difficulties while they were minor, so corrective measures could be taken to prevent the child from "getting into the river" of reading disability. Classroom teachers had the opportunity to observe students in a variety of reading activities and were able to observe symptoms of reading difficulty. These were of value to a reading specialist when a child was referred for a reading evaluation but often these observations were not available to the specialist and their benefits were lost. A simple checklist on which classroom performance observations could be recorded by the classroom teacher was needed.

A review of related literature and research indicated that teacher observation in the identification of the child with reading problems was of prime importance. It further indicated that a child's reading difficulty could be attributed to one or a combination of these causes:

1. A lack of basic reading skills. This included sight vocabulary, word attack skills, and comprehension skills. Most reading disability seemed to have its source in this area.

2. A lack of language skills. This included difficulty in following oral and written directions and also in oral and written expression. It caused the child to become a non-responder.

3. Conditions and circumstances. This included sight and hearing problems, auditory and visual perception difficulties, speech problems, lack of fine motor skills, and many absences from school.

4. Poor learning behaviors. This included disinterest, and the lack of initiative and self-motivation. It resulted in non-responding behavior, withdrawal, and a poor identity. Often poor learning behaviors were the results of the previously listed causes of reading difficulty.

The review of literature showed a need for close cooperation between reading specialist and the classroom teacher. Each needed help from the other to make an accurate diagnosis of the child's reading problem. This made the two a team with the welfare of the child their mutual concern, and it made the possibility of correction or remediation more feasible.

A Classroom Performance Observations checklist was devised to be used by the teacher to record observations. It was to be completed by the teacher who had referred a child for diagnosis of a reading problem. It included these areas of classroom performance: sight vocabulary, word attack skills, oral reading, comprehension, listening, language skills, initiative, identity, and fine motor skills.

Three purposes for the development of the checklist included:

1. To bring teacher observation to the attention of the reading specialist.
2. To make teachers more aware of behaviors that indicated reading difficulty.
3. To involve the teacher in making a decision as to whether the referred child's problem was basically a lack of reading skills.

The checklist was found to be appropriate and useful by three reading specialists. They distributed it to twenty teachers who had referred students for reading evaluations. A checklist was completed for each referred child. The teacher then met with the specialist in a short conference to evaluate the instrument. They considered these questions:

1. Did you feel the information you gave was of value to the reading specialist?
2. What were your reactions to the questions?
3. Did you feel the checklist was of value to you, and would you be willing to use it again?

The reactions of the teachers were then considered by the writer and the reading specialists to determine the effectiveness of the checklist. The reactions included:

1. Each teacher found the checklist thought provoking. It enabled her to see the child's total performance picture more clearly.

2. The process was more time consuming than had been anticipated.

3. The teachers felt the information they had given was valuable and they were pleased to have been able to provide it.

4. Seventeen teachers felt the experience had been of value to them in enabling them to recognize areas of difficulty.

5. Seven teachers found specific areas of skill deficiency and expressed confidence to begin corrective work with guidance from the reading specialist.

6. Eighteen teachers found the reading difficulty of the children they had referred was basically a lack of reading skills.

7. One recognized that she had referred a child whose problem was not one of reading and withdrew the referral.

8. All expressed a willingness to use the checklist again.

The reading specialists evaluated the effectiveness of the instrument and found:

1. It was clear, concise, and easy to use.

2. It provided useful information that would have been difficult to obtain in any other way.

3. It made teachers aware of behaviors which indicated reading difficulty and continued use would make it a training instrument for teachers.

4. It made the teacher part of a diagnostic team.

5. It worked well with the referral form and could be made a part of it.

Conclusions

This study revealed to the writer these things:

1. Teacher observations were of value in the diagnosis of reading problems, and the Classroom Performance Observations checklist was a good vehicle to bring them to the reading specialist making the diagnosis.

2. The Classroom Performance Observations checklist caused teachers to become more aware of the symptoms of reading difficulties so that a child could be identified while his difficulties were still minor.

3. Teachers were pleased to have their observations considered and to become part of a team that was working to provide correction to reading problems.

4. Most reading problems began with a lack of basic reading skills.

Recommendations

There was only one recommendation at this time, and it was:

1. The use of the Classroom Performance Observations checklist was to be continued as a part of the referral form to the reading specialists in the Helena Elementary Schools. While it was useful in bringing information to the specialist, it was also useful as a training instrument to make teachers more aware of the symptoms of developing

reading problems. In this way, it might prevent other children from "getting into the river" of reading disability.

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