

Remedial Reading

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FOREWORD

This article on Remedial Reading is based on the theory that any child, who is not born mentally defective, can learn to read—but that some children have excellent private reasons for not being WILLING to learn.

Let it be clear throughout this discussion that we are not speaking of the child who is born feeble-minded. True feeble-mindedness is an organic defect due to the imperfect development of the foetus. Stigmata of degeneration, as they are called, are manifest in both psyche and soma, as with the Mongoloid types. Such children do not develop rudimentary common sense in even the simpler affairs of everyday living, and all levels of their human relationships are affected.

We are discussing those children who show that they can invent ways to "get what they want" in the small affairs of everyday living. When goals are truly *of their own choosing*, they demonstrate realistic efforts toward accomplishing them. Many children appear to be inept, clumsy, backward or even stupid when it comes to executing any wish or expectation *emanating from us*. But the same child will show uncanny insight and persistence in something he wants to get or do. A child that can set goals and plan successful strategies to accomplish them is not feeble-minded. It is of such children that we speak.

And, for the purposes of this discussion, we can disregard differences of mental agility, once we have ruled out true feeble-mindedness. Both a tortoise and a hare can cover a hundred yard course despite the fact that one can do it in less time. Both have *equal capacity* to achieve the same goal apart from the time factor.

If then, in the following discussion, we use the term "Any child," it is to be understood that we exclude those relatively few children who are organic cases of feeble-mindedness. We do, however, include those children who are considered slow or of "low mentality" and those who have functional disorders not due to true feeble-mindedness. The truly feeble-minded child shows his lack of common understanding so early

and in so many ways that he is frequently eliminated from the race before he gets into school. We consider those children, who can adapt themselves in most ways to the problems of living with others in society without being too much of a burden, as being essentially intelligent children even though they may be far below average in the *expression* of intelligence and common sense along useful lines.

We believe that any child who can learn to remember the names and faces of his associates can also learn to remember the faces and names of the various written words in our language—if he has the inner-will to do so and we give him proper encouragement. Learning to read is a “knack” like learning to swim or to ride a bicycle. “Where there is a will, there is a way.” We do not believe that school subjects depend on some special kind of intelligence. In short, a child who shows evidence of intelligence in art, mechanics or some other line ought not be considered as being “born short” of some special kind of intelligence needed to do reading, arithmetic or spelling. We believe that a child either has or has not intelligence and that if he has intelligence, it can be developed toward any goal he freely chooses. It should be remembered that even intelligent adults often “fail” at projects they are obliged to do against their inner-will. We must not judge a child’s intelligence as “low” merely because he does not learn what we wish him to learn. Nor is he stupid just because he fails to pass tests that we pose for him.

As an example, let us cite Joe who had flunked every intelligence test and every school subject up to his 17th year. He was in a reform school and was considered feeble-minded. A final test was given before reassigning him to another school for such children. On his return from the clinical test, he discussed the experience with lofty scorn. “Do you know what that psychologist did?” asked Joe. “He showed me a picture of a man sawing wood with the saw *upside down* and asked me whether I could see anything wrong in the picture.” With a curl of the lip, Joe said that he replied, “No, it looks all right to me!”

This supposedly feeble-minded boy, in a casual conversation, asked whether light has color, *per se*, and whether it can be seen. He entered into a discussion of light, color and finally inter-stellar space. He asked penetrating questions that showed that he followed the explanations since the questions arose from previous answers given to him. But in the eyes of the law and in the view of his educators, he was feeble-minded.

We believe, then, that a child who shows the insight to understand and execute some things well on his own initiative cannot be considered lacking in mental capacity to do other things, too. To be more specific, we cite those children who fail in school work and then leave school eventually to become excellent repair men of motor cars and similar activities. This demands a high level of insight and planning ability to accomplish. We believe such individuals did not lack the basic capacity to do what was expected of them in school but that they got off on the wrong foot and never made the effort subsequently to compensate the original defeats.

This approach and viewpoint brings up the whole validity of Intelligence Tests as now administered and designed. The majority of individuals consider them the final word on the *basic capacity* of any one who is tested by them. Those with much greater experience in such matters tend to become more mellow in their judgments. In such tests, they tend to see the present level of functioning rather than to assert that the results represent the fundamental capacities of the individual. We feel that any child who is emotionally rejecting participation in the life of his community ought not be judged by static tests until he has been relieved of his emotional blocks.

Human capacities developed because of the *interdependence* of human beings. Emotional rejections cause a child to create social-distance and feeling-distance between himself and those around him. He does not rightly call upon his basic capacities while he is at a feeling-distance from his society. We should not, then, be surprised if he has not developed latent capacities into manifest abilities! The child who has not "felt equal" to the life around him should not be judged the same as one who does not feel that he is rejected by his environment.

For the *practical purposes* of education, then, we should consider all children who are not constitutionally feeble-minded as educable. We should not be limited in our striving by "test results" for no test has yet been invented that will judge the imponderables of human beings! People will always surprise us by their grandeur or their folly! Who is truly wise enough to know the limits of human capacity?

We feel that any approach to the education of a child other than that of *unlimited optimism* is a criminal injustice against him and a show of unwarranted arrogance on our part. Courage is contagious and so is pessimism. As educators, we should adopt no opinions that fasten

the pessimism of our own views on that wonderfully resourceful invention of evolution—the human child!

So let us joyously assume that “any child” can be taught to do anything that other human beings are able to do. If we are ignorant and mistaken in this view, we can damage no one by holding it. And the courage we imbibe from such a view is a sweeter brew than that of pessimism. The sublime “ignorance” of optimism alone accomplishes the “impossible.” Let those who choose quibble over the “limits” of human intelligence.

A POINT OF VIEW

Remedial Reading, as herein conceived, is a point of view rather than a series of rites and observances. In this respect, it is a sharp departure from all other approaches to the problem. This approach is based on a *wholly different hypothesis* from the one currently popular. And unless this fact is understood and kept in mind, it will not be possible to succeed with this method. The two hypotheses cannot be mixed or confused if results are to be obtained effectively for one is the *complete negation* of the other.

The two hypotheses may be described as the “Cannot” and the “Will Not” theories of reading disability. The “Cannot” view is the one currently held and is the basis of most of the present remedial “reading methods.” At the very core of it lies a more or less clearly expressed assumption that the child has specific mental or organic disabilities unrelated to his generally expressed abilities. Such a child, for example, may display a remarkable memory for baseball scores, promises of lollipops, plots of movies and other things of specific interest to him but appears to lack any ability to remember academic instruction. In school work, he may appear to be incapable of learning one or more subjects, and those who try to teach him usually proceed “as if” he were stupid.

Regardless of how much its proponents try to hide this from themselves and from the child, it is evident from their techniques that they imply it. Stripped of its polite assertions that the child is “not stupid,” the rites and observances practiced by the present-day remedial teacher are nothing more than glorified drill, largely on a more atomized and intensive level. This is sometimes accomplished with the aid of expensive machines sold by optical companies to the devotees of this school of thought.

Words, sounds of letters and combinations of letters are taught, *per se*, and often without context. In the majority of instances there is little effort to meet the interest level of the child. On the contrary, his nose is firmly held on the grindstone of his "current recognition-level of individual words." The painful process known as "vocabulary building" is considered basic and the child is not allowed to move faster than this growth allows.

In the case of a child whose interest level is mature, he is obliged to read (under pressure) the kind of material that would probably be dull even to a child of four! And because a child thus handled gets no intellectual or emotional stimulation from such ritual the progress, if any, is slow and costly. It is always accomplished under duress of some kind and when this pressure is released, the child usually stops reading unless pushed further. Seldom does a child so taught read voluntarily for personal satisfaction.

The "Will Not" hypothesis is a wholly different conception. It assumes that the child has *as much capacity* to master the mechanics of reading as any other child—but that something happened in the past so that he wishes to AVOID facing the work of reading. The attack, therefore, centers on his UNWILLINGNESS rather than on an assumed lack-of-capacity.

The "Cannot" approach to reading disabilities makes much of abnormalities of the eye and leans heavily on "differences in level of intelligence among children" to explain the phenomenon of the non-reader. But all that these handicaps could possibly do would be to *slow down* the rate of progress of one child as against another. They cannot explain the block and the emotional rejection that is always encountered in reading problems.

In short, such handicapped children would also learn to read despite the added difficulty if they kept going toward the goal of learning to read. But the problem encountered is that they are engaged in both active and passive ways of avoiding any further contact with the printed page if they can escape it. In many cases, there is openly expressed shame and other feelings of inferiority. In others, there is open hostility to anyone who tries to help them to read. In all cases, there is a movement *away from* further consideration of the problem even though the child may express a verbal wish to learn to read.

This shift in emphasis from "Cannot" to "Will Not" opens a WHOLE NEW WAY OF APPROACH to the child and to the teacher. The problem

becomes one of *undermining the child's inner-unwillingness to keep trying* until he finds the knack of reading. Its method is ENCOURAGEMENT! And by encouragement, we do not mean praising and cheering him onward. A person becomes encouraged only when dangers are removed from ahead of him or when he finds a way to remove them himself.

What *danger* is it that blocks the path of the child who "Will Not" read? It is the danger of *social humiliation* repeated again and again, as in his past. Because he is an intelligent child, he has sense enough to AVOID a situation in which he feels certain he will be *attacked and belittled always!* And because he is intelligent, he wishes to avoid being obliged to struggle with words, *per se*, when they are not related to anything that HE considers interesting.

The value of such an approach to the problem lies in the fact that we assert the equality of this child *with all other children* and this is indeed a NEW EXPERIENCE for him! Another advantage lies in the fact that shifting emphasis to his "unwillingness" places the blame on a factor over which he has some control and about which he can do something. He can easily understand this point without humiliation whereas it is soul-destroying to believe oneself "stupid" or to have others believe it about oneself!

Such children need only to understand that an unfortunate chance (of one kind or another) got them started on the wrong foot and that they fell behind others before they or anyone else realized the danger. Once behind, their pride led them to avoid the problem rather than to catch up in the race.

Neither a child nor an adult can endure the thought that he is "inferior" to those around him. With such a belief, he can never gather his powers together to move forward. One must believe in his own equality and essential dignity if he is to be able to function effectively in life. The "Will Not" hypothesis does not degrade the child with an expressed or tacit accusation of stupidity and inequality and then try to get him to lift himself with his own bootstraps! On the contrary, it gives him his birthright and challenges him to use it rather than to deny it. There is an old saying: "One's feet do not stand around while the body is being abused"—but we often forget it! Any person who can remember this can become a Remedial Reading Teacher—or a teacher of anything else he knows how to do himself.

THE SAD "PAST" OF A READING PROBLEM

If we think of the situation of a child who cannot read instead of thinking only of the fact that he cannot read, we see the tortures to which he has been subjected. There are certain things common to all such children:

1. They got off on the wrong foot. There are a number of things that can lead one to make mistaken or halting efforts, in the beginning of anything. It is good for a Remedial Reading Teacher to know what such things are and how they work to hamper the child. But *it is not necessary* to know these things to repair the damage. All that is needed is to get the child to a place where he is *willing* to try again!

2. The child who is a reading problem has suffered *social humiliation* over a long period of time. He has been the butt of jibes from his classmates, or irritated attacks from his teachers and Heaven alone knows what kind of pressures from his parents who are "ashamed" of him. With the cumulative weight of such guilt, he approaches the whole problem in fear and trembling lest he lose further prestige. And he has no hope of gaining what he has not been able to gain in the past. He does not realize that his mind has not been on reading—that instead it has been on his pain and humiliation!

3. He has been set apart from other children and often held back with younger groups so that he has no status with them or those ahead of him. He is a child without a Country!

If such a child is to regain his SELF CONFIDENCE we must remove the whole business of "learning to read" from all its past connotations so he will never FAIL in his efforts with us, no matter how many mistakes he may make. A mistake must be considered as "only a *friendly invitation* to keep trying"—in the spirit of a game.

We must remember, historically, that he has always considered reading as "serious business"—and to him, it has been very serious business. As a matter of fact, he has lost all self-esteem and the regard of those around him as well as promotion with his peers. Is it any wonder, then, that we must make light of the matter and see that he is led in FUN instead of being driven by compulsion toward reading!

Viewed in this light, we shall not pin our faith on drill and repetition for these are drudgery. They bear more than an "air of constraint"

and no one of us would do them if not driven to the task. The child has been belittled enough in the past and it is useless to heap insult on injury!

REMEDIAL READING TECHNIQUES

The ability to read is a "knack" or a "trick" that must be found by each for himself. It CANNOT BE TAUGHT, in the strict sense of the word. Like all knacks or tricks, a person must PLAY WITH THE PROBLEM until he "catches on" to it. Once this has happened, IF HIS INTEREST IS CONTINUED, he will gain competence in the skill.

Learning to read is much like trying to take apart those metal-ring puzzles with which children delight in playing. If one fumbles with them long enough, they come apart—but it is not easy to tell one how it is done. The secret lies in *keeping up interest* until it is mastered.

Teaching a child to read, then, consists almost wholly in making the experience so entertaining and challenging that he WANTS to persist until the knack is mastered. IT MUST BE DONE IN THE SPIRIT OF PLAY. If force, pain, humiliation enter the process at any point, the child may begin to concentrate on his *discomfort*. Then his mind will be filled with unhappiness and will not be free for the eye-mind-comprehension coordinations that must be made in order to get the knack.

A Remedial Reading Teacher, then, is anyone who has enough imagination to get children to play with and enjoy themselves with words. How we ever make "bent lines" speak to us is a mystery beyond human comprehension, deeply buried in the human psyche. But with the proper "spirit of irreverence" almost anything can be turned into a game! And for those who believe it is "sinful" to make any kind of learning pleasant, it may relieve their conscience to quote Plato's Republic. Says Plato, "Nor should any trace of slavery be found in the studies of a freeborn man. In the case of the mind, no study pursued under compulsion remains rooted in the memory. Pupils must be trained in their studies in a playful manner, without any air of constraint, and with the further objective of discerning more readily the natural bent of their respective characters."

Children who have not learned to read are only children who have *never had any fun while trying to learn to read*. And the only way they can ever learn to read is to help them find the fun in playing with words and letters. THE MORE FUN THEY HAVE, THE QUICKER THEY WILL LEARN TO READ and there is no better, easier way they can be helped.

THE INTEREST LEVEL

These are modern times. Children become accustomed at an early age to listen to the radio and to see in the movies and comics tales that are quite adult in character. Children, these days, are wise beyond their years in many ways. It is an insult to such native intelligence to select books for them to read that are *on their reading level!*

If we are to help a child find fun in reading, we must make sure that the print we present him is full of humor, action, suspense, and concerned with subjects that somehow touch his interest and experience. Such material cannot possibly be on his reading level in the beginning but if it is on his *interest* level, he will have some incentive to make an effort. And best of all, with our help, he will forget he cannot read in his desire to find what is hidden behind the print!

When keen interest is present, almost nothing is impossible. Remember always that there are no interesting or uninteresting books—there are only interested or uninterested children! Every child is interested in SOMETHING! Find out what that interest is and begin from there with the most exciting presentation you can find in print. Let the vocabulary be what it may—and help him with the words he does not know, even if you have to help him with every word in the beginning!

A burning interest in a story has a magic power to help a child remember words—and more than that we cannot do for we do not need to teach him HOW to read. This he must teach himself!

THE JOB OF LEARNING TO READ

Group the children to be taught according to the kind of interests they display. Get a book for each group that “moves fast” in its exposition of this interest. Let there be little in it that does not tell the story. Give each child a book and something like an orange-wood stick to use as a pointer while he reads. The reason for the pointer is that many find it difficult to follow print at the beginning and moving the pointer along-the-line-being-read helps the eyes to train themselves to follow in orderly manner, and from left to right as they should move.

Read aloud enough of the story to the group so that all are firmly caught in a web of interest and suspense. Go far enough so the characters and background of the story are exposed to them and the plot begins to develop. Then, when they begin to want to know what will happen next, have them “take turns” at reading to others. The others

in the group should be following along with the reader and should be ready to start at any moment they may be called upon to read.

The one who is reading should read all the words he recognizes. When he seems about to halt or stumble, give him the word—or let a member of the group give it to him. The main point to observe is that it be done BEFORE he halts. The story must unfold without hesitation so nothing happens to damage the interest in the plot!

No mention should be made of the words he has failed to recognize, regardless of how many you have to give him. Stop to laugh or discuss frequently to rest the children and re-establish the spirit of fun if it begins to fray.

From time to time, read a few paragraphs aloud to the group while they follow silently. Then begin to have them read aloud.

WATCH YOUR VOICE AND SPIRIT. Keep a note of amusement in both of them—and a smile in your eyes. Laugh with the group to encourage them to realize that the old days of sorrow and humiliation have passed forever with regard to reading. Not until the nightmares of the past have faded from their memories will they begin to center their full attention on finding the knack of reading. The human mind can think only of one thing at a time. Theirs has been concentrated on the "*fear of disapproval*" of which they have experienced so much for so long. When they finally are convinced that it is safe to "make a mistake" and that no blame will be attached to it if they do, then they will move ahead rapidly.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN REMEDIAL READING

As has been pointed out before, the central problem of remedial reading is to get the child over his discouragement with regard to the process called reading. This discouragement must be burned up in the bright, hot flame of interest and curiosity. Only by getting a child who has failed to learn to read interested in an exciting story, which lures him on from page to page, will he mobilize the continuous effort necessary to learn the "trick" of reading. This is the only real remedy that can be applied.

There are, however, subordinate considerations which a teacher should know. These should never be placed before the factor of making the lesson "fun." But, if they are kept in mind by the teacher, they will guide her in devising whatever kind of extra assistance each child needs as she encounters it.

One of the most frequent reasons why some children get off the track at the beginning and become reading failures is "left-sidedness." This is a world made for right-sided people. The majority of people are born right-sided and everything from shaking hands when we meet a friend to golf-clubs or can-openers demands that we use our right hand in preference to the left. There are, however, according to the estimates of some, about forty per cent of us who were born left-sided. Of these, only about two per cent continue to use their left hand for writing and other skills.

The point of importance lies in the fact that the motions we make are instinctively toward the "stronger" side of the body. This means that a child born left-sided instinctively moves his eyes *from the right toward the left!* But all print must be read *from the left toward the right* in our language. This means that such children tend to see the last part of a word before the first part. As a result, "was" looks like "saw" to such a child and he suffers such confusions until he gets the "knack" of making his eyes *reverse their instinctive* direction of movement.

Any reading teacher should become aware of which is the "stronger side" of each child to make sure that he is not getting off the track for this reason. Simple tests that may disclose this fact are to ask a child to "wink at you" and note which eye he uses; or, observe if he smiles "more broadly" on the left side of the face (arching left eye-brow) or otherwise shows more *expressive movement of muscles* on that side. Watch also for reversals.

In training such children, they should be told that they tend to see the wrong end of a word first and should be given the explanation for it. They should be told that they are "just as bright" as the other children but this *delayed* them inadvertently. Then they should be encouraged to use a pointer or their finger to follow along the line as they read until their eyes have established the *habit* of moving in the direction of the print.

For all practical purposes, this is the most important biological limitation a teacher will encounter in a child. Of course, deafness and poor vision are factors not to be overlooked. When biological handicaps are present and have acted to get the child off the track in the beginning, a certain caution must be observed in explaining their effect to the child. We must tell him of them and their role when we start to work on his reading problem. But we must do it in a way that will not allow

him to think he can use his handicap as an alibi against further effort.

In explaining a handicap, the teacher should adopt the same attitude she would use if a traveler found himself on the wrong road and she told him that he had taken the wrong fork in the road—that he has no choice but to go back to that fork and take the other turn. In short, only a matter of fact statement without undue sympathy or pandering should be used. Once mentioned at the beginning, no more reference should be made to it, lest the child attach useless importance to the handicap.

Wherever a handicap is present more, rather than less, energy must be mobilized to overcome it. We must make sure, then, that in trying to reduce the child's sense of guilt at his failure, we do not furnish him an argument for not putting all his energy and interest into his work. Neither the child nor the teacher, from this point onward, should ever think of the handicap as a further factor in the problem. It should be viewed as something that will pass away as the knack of reading is being mastered.

All other considerations we shall discuss stem from the *handling* the child has had at home and at school. Many will object that some children have such a "low I.Q." that it is not possible to teach them to read and that it is this factor of fundamental, biological nature called "intelligence" that is the problem.

The ability to learn to read is inherent in all human beings except for those instances of actual biological sensory defect or true mental deficiency. Such instances are, in terms of the total population, few in relation to the number of children who fail to learn to read from "emotional" reasons. The large majority of children who do not keep up with their class are really only *discouraged* children who hide their hurt feelings and anger under a mask of indifference or "stupidity" so that the world will not see their suffering. Their hope of moving forward is gone and they have stopped trying to develop their capacities.

Such discouragement can arise from countless situations in the home and the school. It is often noticed that if one child is especially quick to learn or is the favored child, then the child next to him in the family appears "dull." This is seldom due to less intelligence in such a child. It arises because he feels *over-shadowed* and loses his courage to go forward. As a result, he does not really mobilize his forces to the attack of problems but tends to give up easily and retire from further effort in his own behalf.

The teacher who would help such discouraged children must give up all belief in the essential "dullness" of those she would instruct. While she has any lingering doubts within herself, she will never find a way to remove their discouragement. They will sense her lack of confidence in them and "feel betrayed" by her as they have been betrayed by others before her.

A teacher of such discouraged children must realize that there is always a number of mistaken adjustments to be expected with each of them. Discouragement *always* leads one to engage in *useless* activities as a way of avoiding the kind of useful activity that would lead one into risking activity in which he is sure he would fail rather than accomplish. Such children will be easily distracted by the scene outside the window, or by footsteps in the hall, or will want to talk about the pictures in the book. There is no end of things that they can find distracting so as to put a safe distance between them and the problem of learning to read. This is why it is so vitally important to read the exciting story to them until their attention is firmly caught and their interest burning to find the next step in the plot.

It is useless to fight with such children to "make them pay attention." Interest is a wild bird that takes flight at the first sign of compulsion. It must be held *in an open hand* even when finally caught. Once frightened, it is harder to attract again!

This brings us to the relationship of the teacher and the child. It is unfortunate that so many teachers have habitually employed pressure and punishment in an effort to oblige a child to "learn." The teacher who would aspire to do remedial work must purge herself of all desire to use force of any kind. She must approach the child as *an equal human being* and not as a "superior" who rules and punishes when one fails to please her. There is no place for impatience and irritability in a remedial teacher. She must not try to rule the child nor must she encourage the child to react against her as if she were a superior.

Discouraged children react against those who assume positions of "superiority" to them either by a show of stubbornness and opposition or by passing most of their own burdens to the "stronger one" (?) to be carried by him for them! Avoid being either the Master or the Servant of a child. Be content to treat him as a friend.

One basic consideration that must be held in mind at all times is that discouraged children are haunted by the "Fear of Failure." This

means that they are afraid to try anything that they have not learned to do. Such children have long memories of the years of scoldings, humiliations and social degradation they have experienced by being compared to "more successful" children. They have had the jibes of both teachers and contemporaries when they have *tried and failed in public*. They prefer in effect to be considered stupid rather than to risk any more public humiliation *when they do try*. For this reason, the remedial teacher must emphasize to these children that a mistake is "only a friendly invitation to try again"—and that no one will be humiliated FOR TRYING in her remedial classes. And she must stick to this philosophy. She must be quite severe with anyone who belittles any child for making a mistake when he is honestly trying to do something. Most of all, she too must give up punishing or belittling any child who makes an error! Only by trying and fumbling at the start can we learn anything. It is criminal for anyone to ridicule or punish under such circumstances. A child can only retire in anger *within himself* if we make this mistake against him.

Now we come to what are called Modern Reading Methods which are being used in the majority of schools. The rise in the number of reading problems may stem from a too great dependence on any *one* "reading method." No one method can ever be a "right" method, for not all people learn alike. Some people learn more easily by impressions through the eyes, some through the ears and others by sensations through their muscles. With all of us, the sensations of one organ assist and complement the others. If we can combine sight, smell, sound and movement, we have the best possible chance to learn. But to depend on any one of them with the others in abeyance is to risk an early failure.

Some current methods teach whole sentences at a time without any consideration of the structure of the individual words or the sounds of individual letters. And seldom is a child encouraged to form letters or spell words at the same time that he sounds them. Such a method utilizes only the eyes without bringing to bear all the other senses *at the same time*. It is easy to see, then, how quickly a child who is left-sided can get behind since he has less chance of reinforcing his perception through his other faculties. The remedial teacher must devise entertaining games which cause children to use sound, sight, movement—all faculties together so that impressions are reinforced from every angle simultaneously.

This brings us to the place of drill in phonetics and word-structure in remedial teaching. The English language is most difficult since no one can say precisely how a word sounds from the way it is spelled nor how it should be spelled from the way it sounds. A child must learn the sounds of individual letters, their changes and various combinations. The remedial teacher, therefore, must somehow introduce such material to the child.

It is useless, however, to *begin* on letter or word drill with a child who is discouraged. His interest in reading stories must be firmly established before we may expect him to endure the abstractness of letter sounds and word construction. As soon as his sense of defeat and frustration begins to lighten, it is safe to devise and play games that the teacher can make up as she goes along, games that will serve to show the behavior of phonics.

For example, in working on the alphabet, children can be given this sentence: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." Tell them that every letter of the alphabet occurs in this sentence at least once. Give them a chance to find each letter and make up the alphabet from them. If done in the spirit of play, it becomes as much fun as hunting Easter -eggs!

All kinds of simple games will come to a teacher's mind as soon as she begins to think along the lines that "playing with the alphabet can be fun." To tell children that they are going to play the "Magic E Game" arouses their curiosity. The vowels can be separated from the rest of the alphabet and "e" underlined. Then the children can be given simple three letter words in which "vowel sounds" (soft) occur such as in cap, bit, cut. After practising on sounding such simple words, the children can be asked to add an "e" to each of the three letter words in the list. When this has been done, they can be told that the "e" says nothing but forces the vowel in the middle of the word to say its name and also changes the whole meaning of the word; thus, cap becomes cape, bit becomes bite and cut becomes cute. And that is why it is called "Magic E."

But drill for its own sake can only serve to further alienate the children from any interest in reading. And what they learn will not be remembered or applied under such circumstances. Retention is best guaranteed by interest.

Another important consideration in remedial reading is of paramount importance. Children today live very complex lives. They spend

hours every week listening to mystery stories on the radio and viewing thrillers in the movies. This develops a sophisticated and *mature taste* in literature in comparison to their age and reading ability. But books provided for beginning readers are all too often on an infantile level of interest.

We must not *offend the dignity* of a child by giving him material to read that is below his interest level and considered by him to be "for babies." The following example illustrates this crime and also indicates why remedial efforts of the past had had no effect. (This crime in choice of reading text books has to be laid on the doorstep of those responsible for current educational philosophy.) An overgrown boy of eight was a serious reading problem. He had not responded to measures taken at school to increase his ability. In a general discussion with him regarding his interest in stories, it developed that he loved detective fiction. Because of the radio dramas heard by most children, this is very apt to be the case. When asked what book he was reading at school, he countered that he could not remember its name. He was then asked what the book was about. Hanging his head in evident embarrassment and in a voice weak with shame he said, "Oh, I dunno—it's somethin' about Bill an' Sue an' Perky an' Muff!"

This same boy, however, when given a book with action and suspense began to revive like a wilted plant. He began to unfold his energy *toward* the mastery of the skill of reading. Such development will seldom happen while a child feels degraded by the triteness of the material presented to him. His outraged self-respect is apt to block progress.

Though the "fear of failure" has been mentioned before, it is so important that it deserves further comment. No one has failed unless he has *stopped* trying! No child will stop trying as long as the teacher maintains the element of "fun" in her approach. Only if she gets "teacherish" about the matter will the old discouragement return to block the child. If this happens, it is the teacher's failure and not the child's!

Again, we believe that biological difficulties such as left-sidedness, deafness and poor vision may slow up a child initially in his efforts—but they do not cause him to fail! He gives up trying only when social humiliation sets in and he begins to get a feeling of social degradation in relations to others in his group! We should not regard, then, the biological handicap as a "cause" of his failure; it explains only why he was slower and could not keep up at the beginning.

Our efforts, as remedial teachers, must be to kindle the spark of interest and fan it into a flame strong enough to burn up discouragement in the flame of *interest*. Achievement will follow as night follows day.

SUMMARY

From the above, it is to be seen that we consider the non-reader as a person who is blocked at the social-emotional level of life rather than at the mental level of functioning. He is a human being who is caught in a situation he feels to be hopeless and he is reacting to his total environment on the basis of his hidden anger and hurt feelings. When we view him as a part of his social gestalt, we find him in conflict and disrepute in many ways other than the single symptom of non-reading!

The non-reader is a wounded animal at bay, tormented by and tormenting those around him. His parents are humiliated by his "backwardness"; his teachers are irritated because he is a special burden in the class; other children make or infer odious comparisons; he seldom has good friends of his own age; he usually has no satisfying hobbies. In short, his relationships with the outside world are usually most unsatisfactory and devoid of useful compensations that would give him a feeling of human worth.

And because we see his non-reading as only *one small symptom* in the total picture, we do not get excited about it as a "cause." He has already over-valued its significance in his life and we do not want to make the same mistake!

On the contrary, we speak *with* him (not at him) about his social life and his painful feelings and the bad relationships he makes with others. We expose his "fighting attitude" toward life—as well as toward reading. We encourage him to "treat others better" and to trust that they will respond in kind. We speak with his parents, as frequently as possible, to encourage them to look at this boy with favor again instead of looking down on him as an outcast in his group. We beg his teachers to give up their pessimistic view of his "hopeless stupidity" and his worthless behavior. We challenge the child to make more friends among his contemporaries instead of allowing him to withdraw into his hypersensitive feelings when approached. We even ply him with candy while we talk with him so that he feels that he is valued!

And at the same time, we accept no alibis for times when he is not making honest efforts to work with us in his behalf. We do not punish

but we make it clear to him that he is treating us unfairly at such times, and that we are conscious of his unfriendliness in doing so. We make each situation a 50-50 relationship in which he must do his best at that particular moment and we add our best to his. We grant no free rides on the merry-go-round. We refuse to be his servant—nor do we insist on being his master; we match the degree of his initiative with our own.

The non-reader is a human being in a *social context*—not just a faltering brain faced with a printed page! He has been made hostile by defeats and we must help him lighten his hostility and the hostility he has engendered in others. Only then does he find the courage to overcome his limitations.

SOME FOOTNOTES FOR INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

The increasingly high incidence of Reading Failures in all school systems in this country today is a matter of considerable alarm amongst educators. The high proportion of Reading Failures has given birth to the Remedial Reading Expert. There is a sufficiently large number of such experts now in the field of education that a National Remedial Reading Association has been formed.

Many Individual Psychologists already are or are becoming interested in remedial reading work. They are eminently fitted to be of major assistance in this field because of Alfred Adler's particular contribution to the understanding and education of children. The experienced Individual Psychologist has the distinct advantage of being in a position to effect unusually rapid progress in remedial reading cases. It has been our experience that the average time required to give a child a good start in reading is fifteen individual, one-hour sessions, on a weekly or semi-weekly basis. We know of no other "school of thought" which can claim more rewarding results.

We have reviewed our fifty most recent remedial reading cases in order that we may present to interested Individual Psychologists some high-lights which might be of special interest to them. Following are some of these high-lights with comments and possible interpretations.

1. *Of the 50 Cases reviewed, 88% were BOYS.*

Remedial Reading Experts will attest to the fact that the vast majority of Reading Failures are boys. It is probable that most educators satisfy themselves on this score with the explanation that the "maturation rate of girls," up to adolescence, is higher than boys. Individual Psychologists have a more significant explanation. Adler has furnished us much insight on the connotations of "masculine" and "feminine" in our culture. Reading is a "sedentary" activity and is probably equated by many young males with "feminine"—and, therefore, to be "rejected." Adler said, "As a boy grows older his masculinity becomes a significant duty, his ambition, his desire for power and superiority is indisputably connected and identified with the duty to be masculine . . . and the

desire to harden himself against so-called 'feminine' tendencies." (*Understanding Human Nature* by Adler, pp. 127 and 128).

2. *Of the 50 Cases reviewed, 86% were predominantly left-sided.*

In the foregoing article on "Remedial Reading" under "Special Considerations in Remedial Reading," we have stated that one of the most frequent reasons why some children *get off the track at the beginning* and become reading failures is "left-sidedness." We wish to repeat that we do not consider left-sidedness as a *cause*. It must be remembered that many individuals, predominantly left-sided, had no difficulty in learning to read. In our experience a left-sided child who is ALSO SENSITIVE (dependent on the opinion of others and lacking in courage) is the child who *gives up* before finding the trick of reading. It is the *discouragement* and *dependence*, not the left-sidedness, which should be of concern to the Individual Psychologist. Let us remember that failure to learn to read is only a symptom. Adler said, "We must never treat a symptom or a single expression; we must discover the mistake made in the whole life style, in the way the mind has interpreted its experiences, in the meaning it has given to life, and in the actions with which it has answered the impressions received from the body and from the environment." (*What Life Should Mean to You* by Adler, page 47).

3. *Of the 50 Cases reviewed, 76% were Active Types.*

We, as Individual Psychologists, should not be surprised to note that in dealing with remedial reading cases we are apt to be dealing with such a high percentage of children who are hostile or indifferent to the outside world! Adler said, "All failures are failures because they are lacking in fellow-feeling and social interest. . . . The meaning they give to life is a private meaning; no one else is benefited by the achievement of their aims and their interest stops short at their own persons." (*What Life Should Mean to You* by Adler, page 8). Such a high percentage of "hostility types" again cautions those of us working with the remedial reading problem not to fall heir to treating the symptom (failure to learn to read). If and when we can help these children toward a more friendly and helpful contact with the outside world, we will note almost immediate progress in reading.

4. *Of the 50 Cases reviewed, 40% were Only Children or Children with Predominantly Only Children Features.**

Adler said, "The Only Child becomes dependent to a high degree, waits constantly for someone to show him the way, and searches for support at all

*In the 50 cases reviewed, there were 10 actual Only Children and 10 children (either oldest of 2 or youngest of 2) with *five years or more* between them and the other sibling. It was Adler's opinion that in dealing with a child whose other sibling was five years or more older or younger we were in the position of dealing with a child who would have many characteristics of the Only Child. (Other Ordinal Positions were sufficiently scattered to make percentages unnoteworthy.)

times." (*Understanding Human Nature* by Adler, page 154). Our discovery of the high percentage of "leaning types" amongst reading failures led us to incorporate in our remedial reading techniques intensive guidance work with parents whenever possible. We have found that if we can win a parent's cooperation to "reorient relationships" at home (destroy the "leaning attitude") and start specific training in self-reliance (removing unnecessary support), the remedial reading lessons required are reduced more than appreciably. A regular class-room teacher, engaging in remedial work, may find that time places a limit on her in this respect but the remedial reading expert should not overlook this enormously effective technique.

5. *Of the 50 Cases reviewed, 58% of Early Memories were of the "DANGER" type and 42% were of the "GETTING" type.*

Adler said, "Among all psychic expressions, some of the most revealing are the individual's memories. His memories are the reminders he carries about with him of his own limits and of the meaning of circumstances. There are no 'chance memories'; out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation. Thus his memories represent his 'Story of My Life'; a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him concentrated on his goal, to prepare him, by means of past experiences, to meet the future with an already tested style of action." (*What Life Should Mean to You* by Adler, page 73). The early memories of the remedial reading cases reviewed can be placed in the category of "danger memories" or "getting memories." Learning to read is part of growing-up (preparing for the future or "looking forward"); to accomplish this task, a child must be courageous enough to persist until he has found the trick of reading or, in other words, must *give something of himself*. Reading failures we have found to be children who are characteristically dependent (looking backward toward babyhood more than forward toward growing-up), children who tend to isolate themselves, avoid danger and damage (advance toward the rear) and/or "look always for what Life has to give them." The getting or danger memories in the cases reviewed serve to substantiate our findings and show that the Reading Failure is a child who habitually *avoids* rather than *tries!* For this reason, we think it a fundamental technique to ALWAYS encourage and challenge a child to TRY and to minimize his fear of making mistakes (training for independence).

In concluding these footnotes, we would like to call attention to the fact that we have found that the "total outlook toward life," as well as the educational disability, of a *seven-year-old* is more susceptible to orientation than any other age group with whom we have dealt. We have found considerably fewer (in most cases half as many) remedial interviews necessary for this age group than any other. It is our belief that the personality-explanations we make to a child of seven have more significant meaning for him because his life style (prototype) is not so sufficiently "jelled" to disallow his incorporation of a different look-toward-life than his original estimation of what life meant.