

Reading Clinics and the College Library

ARE COLLEGE library staff members prepared to realize that much of the reading done by undergraduates is slow, inaccurate, and done without understanding?

Probably the answer is yes.

Do we believe that the diagnosis and treatment of reading difficulties is something which needs to be done at all grade levels?

The answer is perhaps less readily given. Yet there is a steadily growing opinion that a college should provide a testing and remedial program for those of its students who have reading difficulties and should also offer developmental reading instruction for all of its students so that they have a growing intellectual grasp of the various fields studied.¹ This guidance in reading is considered advisable for the average reader, even for the "good" reader, as much as for the retarded one,² and the college library may well be an excellent place in which this guidance can take place.

The reasons advanced for the present state of ineffective reading in schools and colleges are numerous. It is said to be due to the prevailing educational philosophy of the schools³ or due to mass education and indiscriminate promotion from grade to grade.⁴ A single explanation will not serve

all cases; the reasons one student is a poor reader may account in no way for the poor reading of another student. At all times, however, in trying to find reasons for reading difficulties and effective means for their treatment it will be well to bear in mind that, in general, disabilities are constitutional, intellectual, emotional, educational, or environmental.⁵ A student who cannot read may actually be fundamentally incapable of learning, may be sick, or may not be able to adjust effectively to his home or to his school or to himself.⁶ In most cases it will be found that there are several contributing factors in the reading problem of one individual. In many cases some factors are more or less psychological;⁷ yet inappropriate methods of instruction, lack of stimulation in reading, poor vocabulary, or inadequate training in perception may all contribute to ineffective reading.⁸

There would seem to be implications in all this for work at the college level. Remedial work in colleges has so far made very little progress. Many instructors are becoming more and more aware of the great need for remedial work, aware also of the need for more time, more assistance, and more nearly adequate facilities.⁹

There is widespread interest in making better readers of college students—that is,

¹ Gray, William S. "Reading Difficulties in College." *Journal of Higher Education* 7:356, October 1936.

² Kopel, David, and DeBoer, J. J. "Reading Problems of Pressing Importance." *Review of Educational Research* 13:77, April 1943.

³ Wittey, Paul, and Kopel, David. *Reading and the Educative Process*. Boston, Ginn and Co., 1939, p. 203.

⁴ Wittey, Paul. "Practices in Corrective Reading in Colleges and Universities." *School and Society* 52: 568, Nov. 30, 1940.

⁵ Monroe, Marion, and Backus, Bertie. *Remedial Reading: A Monograph in Character Education*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1937, p. 17.

⁶ Gray, William S. "Trends in Remedial Work." *Elementary English Review* 20:47, February 1943.

⁷ Traxler, Arthur E. "The Nature and Use of Reading Tests." *Educational Records Bulletin*, No. 34, 1941, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Wittey, Paul. *Op. cit.*, p. 567.

readers who comprehend more, read faster, and assimilate more into the whole pattern of their personality; there is interest in knowing how many students may be expected to need help with reading; there is interest in testing for reading difficulty, in planning for correction of the difficulty, and in organizing such a program under the most appropriate and effective auspices on a college campus.

Students Who Need Help

Who needs help with reading? All retarded pupils can be helped, regardless of their mental age, except where subnormal intelligence exists.¹⁰ There is a sizable minority of students in almost any college who, with strong potential abilities, fail because of some kind of reading disability. Between 10 and 20 per cent of the members of any entering freshman class have been found to be seriously deficient in reading.¹¹ In a study made at Minnesota, for instance, 20 per cent of the university freshmen read less efficiently than the average eighth-grade pupil. This means that every year approximately six hundred of the students entering the university run the risk of failure because of a reading deficiency.¹² At the University of Chicago "in the class of 1930, and in that for 1931, serious reading disabilities were discovered in 10 to 12 per cent of the cases. . . . Approximately 20 per cent of the students made unsatisfactory scores on one or more parts of the test battery."¹³ At Dartmouth in the class of 1940 36 per cent of the class have a degree of ocular defectiveness large enough to

handicap them in pursuing their studies.¹⁴

It can readily be seen that with such a large number of college students working under some degree of reading difficulty many are not profiting to the fullest extent from their college experience. Those members of the college faculty who are interested in the over-all development of the students may wish to spend some time and thought on working out a remedial reading program. The kind of program will depend upon many variables: institutional objectives, the seriousness of the difficulties, available facilities, and the experience and education of the faculty. Ideally, the program might be organized so that the entire integrating process of college life would be more nearly assured through constant and intensive consultation with appropriately trained faculty members. Until the time comes, however, when such well-rounded planning is possible, each phase of training will have to be dealt with in its own small departmental or divisional way.

Testing Reading Ability

Reading ability might well be tested as one of the numerous functions of an ideally complete clinic. At present it is more likely to be dealt with separately. A few years ago a survey of the facilities offered for remedial reading showed that of nearly seven hundred institutions from which information was requested a few more than one hundred offered varying degrees of training.¹⁵ Obviously then there is still much room for experimental and constructive work. In some cases it may be difficult to start a remedial program because many people think that reading is something which should be learned in the elementary school. Once a serious program is started,

¹⁰ Traxler, Arthur E. *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
¹¹ Imus, Henry Alfred, Rothney, J. W. M., and Bear, R. M. *An Evaluation of Visual Factors in Reading*. Hanover, N.H., Dartmouth Eye Institute of the Dartmouth Medical School, 1938, p. 87.
¹² Triggs, Frances Oralind. *Remedial Reading; the Diagnosis and Correction of Reading Difficulties at the College Level*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1943, p. 18.
¹³ Booker, Ivan A. *Measurement and Improvement of Silent Reading Among College Freshmen*. Chicago, Ph.D. thesis, 1934, p. 78-79.
¹⁴ Bear, Robert M. "Dartmouth Program for Diagnostic and Remedial Reading." *Educational Record* 20:76, January 1939.
¹⁵ Charters, W. W. "Remedial Reading in College." *Journal of Higher Education* 12:117, March 1941.

a major hazard to its success is likely to be too much emphasis on details.¹⁶ It is necessary to remember that patterns of growth and development are more important than specific minutiae.¹⁷

Testing for Reading Difficulty

Any program which deals with reading problems naturally begins with some kind of procedure to test the seriousness and type of the existing difficulties. There is at present no one good diagnostic reading test for the college level,¹⁸ so it is usually necessary to use a rather large battery of tests to discover the various elements which need to be studied.¹⁹ It should be pointed out that a good testing program will have several parts to it. There should be, first of all, tests of the eye: for visual efficiency, clearness of image, refraction, astigmatism, and eye balance. In addition, it will be necessary to know the rate of reading for both silent and oral reading. Photographing eye movements to find the number of movements per line and the number of regressions may be helpful in diagnosing reading difficulties. Some method of discovering comprehension of what has been read will be necessary, and also some test of vocabulary.

Planning for Correction

Once the testing has been done the most important part of the remedial program still remains. How is reading to be improved? What are the goals to be? Five objectives have been suggested as essential to the improvement of the reading process:

(1) the elimination of vocalization in silent reading; (2) an improved mastery of vocabulary; (3) a broadening of the span of recognition; (4) an increase in the speed of recognition; (5) the development of a degree of regularity of procedure that would eliminate most of the regressive movements of the eyes.²⁰ Other aspects of the improvement of reading ability are the ability to read in large units, the importance of thinking of the meaning rather than the words, and the desirability of adapting the technique of reading to the particular type of material and the purposes for which the material is being read.²¹

Lest it be thought that the apparatus of remedial reading is the most essential part of the program or that the tests and corrective measures are important in themselves, it should be stressed that the apparatus used is only a means to an end, that end being to emphasize the fact that reading consists in a process of fusing words into thought units, which should constitute the focus of attention. This can be attained by practice in discovering the author's point of view, by noting the central theme of the material read, by analyzing the author's organization of thought, by finding topic sentences, by selecting the most accurate of several statements of the thought of a passage, by answering factual questions regarding what is read, and by predicting the thought of a paragraph from reading the opening sentence.²²

The actual manuals of methods used for remedial work will vary with the circumstances, but there are certain basic goals for any remedial program: the ability to organize material in the mind, increase reading speed, improve vocabulary, skim

¹⁶ Buswell, Guy T. *How Adults Read*. (Supplementary Educational Monograph No. 45.) Chicago, University of Chicago, 1937, p. 143-44.

¹⁷ Witty, Paul, and Kopel, David. *Op. cit.*, p. 205.

¹⁸ Dearborn, Walter F., and Wilking, S. Vincent. "Improving the Reading of College Freshmen." *School Review* 49:672-73, November 1941.

¹⁹ Mention of actual tests used will be found in several places in the literature of the field; for example, in Dearborn and Wilking, above; in Arthur E. Traxler, *op. cit.*; and in Paul Witty and David Kopel, *op. cit.*, p. 340-48.

²⁰ Buswell, Guy T. *Remedial Reading at the College and Adult Levels; an Experimental Study*. (Supplementary Educational Monograph No. 50.) Chicago, University of Chicago, 1939, p. 8.

²¹ Buswell, Guy T. *How Adults Read*, p. 131.

²² Bear, Robert M. *Op. cit.*, p. 84-85.

pages accurately, and benefit by associational reading.²³ There are so many human variables that it is clear that the most effective remedial work is done on an individual rather than on a group basis. "It is virtually impossible to find a group of subjects so nearly alike in the factors which were studied that they could be given precisely the same treatment at the same time."²⁴

Results of a Reading Program

One may hear it said that programs for testing and improving the reading of college students are a fine thing. But what do they really do? Is it worth while to consider a remedial reading program? How much actual improvement do they effect? What kind of a prediction can be made about the success of such a program? Are the results uniformly good? The evidence which can be used to answer these and other equally vexing questions about reading problems points to the belief that, if the remedial program is carefully organized and supervised, there can be general improvement in scholarship and reading ability.²⁵ The improvement may not be great in many cases; sometimes it may not even be noticeable; but students at all levels of reading ability may be expected to benefit from a good training program. Intelligent pupils may make larger gains than others, and there will be significant differences between students as to the gains made,²⁶ but it probably can be safely predicted that the average reading rate of a group of students will be increased by more than 50 per cent.²⁷

Reading rate may be expected to improve even when specific attention in training is not given to this aspect of the subject,²⁸ and at the same time comprehension will not suffer when rate is increased.²⁹ Discussion of rate has been summarized as follows: "(1) it is generally desirable to read as rapidly as can be done with understanding; (2) the rate of reading for many individuals is much below the rate which might become their normal rate for reading with understanding; (3) the reasons for slow rate may vary, but frequently the cause is one of the following: (a) a habit of vocalizing while reading silently, (b) a narrow span of recognition, (c) a slow perceptual reaction time, (d) mind-wandering while reading; (4) increase in rate of reading may be expected if any or all of these factors (a to d) are improved; (5) improvement of these factors may be expected in a remedial program which can control the reading process with graduated increases in speed and which provides much reading experience under these controlled conditions."³⁰

Not only has it been indicated that improvement from a remedial program results, but it is safe to assume that the improvement will be maintained for at least a year. It has been found that only occasionally does a student fall back to a preremedial level.³¹ With roughly four hours a week of training for a semester, the habit of better reading becomes fairly well fixed and is not easily lost even with the passage of time.

Valuable and successful as reading clinics

²³ In Bond, Elden A. "The Yale-Harvard Freshmen Speed-Reading Experiment." *School and Society* 54: 107, Aug. 16, 1941, the statement is made that "At the beginning of the training period the students read with an average rate of about 215 words per minute. At the end of their training, the average rate had increased to 335 words per minute."

²⁸ Guiler, W. S., and Coleman, J. H. *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁹ Bear, Robert M. *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁰ Buswell, Guy T. *Remedial Reading at the College and Adult Levels*, p. 57-58.

³¹ Imus, Henry Alfred, Rothney, J. W. M., and Bear, R. M. *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

²⁴ Wilking, S. Vincent, and Webster, Robert G. *A College Developmental Reading Manual*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1943, p. v.

²⁵ Buswell, Guy T. *Remedial Reading at the College and Adult Levels*, p. 48-49.

²⁶ Simpson, Robert Gilkey. "The Reading Laboratory as a Service Unit in College." *School and Society* 55:623, May 30, 1942.

²⁷ Guiler, W. S., and Coleman, J. H. "Reading at the College Level." *Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars* 17:26-27, October 1941.

and remedial programs have been, a word of caution should be given. They have almost achieved the status of a fad, perhaps even as much of a fad as mental tests were some twenty years ago. In the opinion of several people,³² the contribution made by the reading clinics will be somewhat analogous to that from the mental testing movement—that which survives will have a small but significant effect upon educational procedures.

The Library as Remedial Center

Reading clinics have a place in the educational picture of colleges today, and it is the main purpose of this paper to suggest that it might be advisable for the college library to become the agency on the campus which is given the responsibility of organizing, staffing, and carrying through a remedial reading program. This suggestion is made even in the light of recent opinion of public librarians that "there is very marked disapproval of any attempt to cope with the problem of reading disability."³³

The college of today—the liberal arts college—is not primarily a research institution or one devoting its primary energies to the professional training of teachers. For that reason any reading program which is organized will not have as fundamental purposes either the organization or dissemination of clinical information about reading, or the training of staff members to carry on the work in other institutions. It has frequently happened that the reading clinic has been developed at universities under the supervision of the department of education with three purposes in mind: (1) remedial work among the undergraduate and graduate students of the institution, (2) research and publication in the field of reading, (3) training of graduate students to

assist in remedial plans and to start or administer programs. The liberal arts college has no such three-fold purpose. It is, and should be, interested primarily in improving the reading of its own students. In planning to carry out this purpose, one of the first questions to be answered is: Who is to be responsible for the remedial program? The answer must be given in terms of economy of operation, availability of material, education of staff, and the overall philosophy of the institution. The college library is the agency which seems to satisfy many requirements.

The cost of a remedial program is considerable under any circumstances. One survey reports the median cost of eighteen programs as over eight hundred dollars;³⁴ another gives two thousand as the annual budget in a large university.³⁵ It would seem that these figures represent, if anything, a low estimate. In almost any college a person trained for the work will have to be employed; equipment for testing will have to be purchased; batteries of tests will have to be bought; reading materials at various levels of difficulty will have to be provided; and some assistance will have to be obtained to administer and correct tests and to help in supervising the actual remedial work. From a financial standpoint the college library as supervisor would probably decrease costs to some extent because existing materials might be more effectively used, thus reducing the cost of purchasing special new aids to instruction.

A remedial program centered in the library would benefit materially from the experience of the library staff in making use of a variety of material already existing in the collection. The staff members know the means of buying appropriate new ma-

³² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³³ Edge, Sigrid A. "Preparation for Library Adult Education." *Library Quarterly* 16:48, January 1946.

³⁴ McCaul, R. L. "Cost of Remedial Programs in 18 Colleges." *School and Society* 51:362, Oct. 17, 1942.

³⁵ Triggs, Frances Oralind. *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

terial and of finding new and unusual sources of good training literature.

There are encouraging signs within the library profession that appropriately trained people may soon be available to assist in remedial reading programs. It is almost possible to describe a new philosophy of training and to note a new emphasis. There is a growing interest in all of the problems relating to communication and reading. Consideration of the basic problems of reading is encouraged, and students are being urged to take work in the departments of education to study reading methods and remedial techniques. Thus it is not impossible to expect that by the time a remedial program is organized in a college library, students from library schools will have been trained and will be the natural choices for positions in the program. Librarians, well trained in remedial reading techniques, will make it even more appropriate for the college library to supervise remedial work.

At the time of the Charters survey³⁶ in 1941 most of the remedial reading work in colleges was carried on as part of a course, either in a special how-to-study course or in freshman English or in psychology. Very often independent units were organized and were under the supervision of instructors in psychology, English, composition, or speech; under the supervision of members of the personnel division; or under the department of education. No record has been found in the literature of the subject concerning a remedial reading program organized in a college or university under the library. The question may well be raised whether there is anything inherent in a remedial reading program which makes it impossible or inadvisable to have the library the supervising agency. Opinion

³⁶ Charters, W. W. *Op. cit.*, p. 118.

has been expressed³⁷ that, since the work consists of regular and systematic drills and checks, it should not be the function of the library, which does not have the time or the money for careful individual work and does not have the power to control enough of a borrower's time to undertake any systematic testing or corrective program. Some writers have felt that the work of the library should be primarily advisory. Yet, no department of a college has the time or the money unless it is given the job to do, and a department's ability to control the student's time is based on the particular task at hand and not on whether the work is done by the department.

The most valid basis for undertaking any new activity on a college campus is its relation to the fundamental philosophy of the institution. The appropriateness of any one means of realizing that philosophy most effectively must be considered. In these days a college education is being looked upon more and more as a potentially integrating experience for the student. This is important and wise. The library has the opportunity of serving as a catalyst to this integration and in no way more than in emphasizing whenever possible the importance of communication, the dissemination of ideas, and the techniques for reading and assimilating print.

Reading and assimilating are problems in all fields—the sciences, the humanities, the arts. Students working in one are as apt to need assistance as are those in another. The library represents physically and mentally a common meeting ground for all, and a reading clinic under its auspices would teach the student techniques of reading, enlarge his understanding, and advance his integration.

³⁷ Lee, Helen M. "Relation of Remedial Reading to the Public Library." *Library Journal* 66:778, Sept. 15, 1941.