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# What About the Non-Reader in the Classroom?

by JESSIE C. BLANK

All children need to know many ways of learning, including reading. But for children of lower ability and for seriously disabled readers it is particularly important that the teacher provide different ways of discovering information. We need to teach so that school will be profitable enough for these children to induce them to stay and learn the skills and attitudes necessary for some kind of social independence. We must give them enough help so that they will have something to contribute to society as citizens rather than be a responsibility of society.

It takes skillful teaching to accomplish this. The best teacher should be flexible - willing to learn and to experiment; he will question and constantly evaluate his techniques. If he is not presently qualified to teach all his students at their level of achievement, he must at least be willing to try. He will seek help where it is available and find ways to help himself if aid is not available. He will read the latest research to know if his methods are good, and he will learn to evaluate and judge for himself whether a particular method or theory is useful. A good teacher will not declare that a thing is not good just because it did not work. If

a thing is good in theory, it is good in practice. If it doesn't work, then it is the practice that is at fault, not the theory.

The teacher must believe that the non-reader has a right to be in the classroom. Unless the teacher believes that he belongs there, neither will the rest of the class, and most unfortunate of all, the non-reader himself will be more and more convinced that he is out of place. It is not completely inconceivable that a person can grow up to be useful and happy in our culture without reading skills. And he must be helped to realize that he is a worthwhile person, even if he does not read. Perhaps helping him to realize and accept the fact that he may never read as well as others can be the first step to teaching him the skills which he must substitute.

Teach him to use the senses he is endowed with. He can feel, see, hear, taste, and smell. If he cannot his information from reading, then he will need to be more alert in other learning techniques. Among these are observing, listening, and thinking. Be sure to keep expectations commensurate with his ability, even in these areas. If he is a slow-learner or a mentally-handicapped individual,



don't expect his listening and thinking to approach the level of the intelligent non-reader.

In discussions, ask him what he thinks. Allow him to express his thoughts. Help him to defend his ideas. Teach him to evaluate what others say.

Help him to discover his own best abilities, however insignificant they may seem. Perhaps only a small part of the integration of the complex process required for reading is lacking. If this is true, he may have many skills. Can he draw or sing, do handiwork, construction, or mechanics? Does he have an eye for color and design? Does he have a sense of humor? Can he remember jokes and riddles? Does he have managerial ability? Does he have imagination? Can he organize? Can he think of better ways of doing everyday things in the classroom? Does he understand nature, or recognize animals, plants, or birds? Is he aware of his environment? These and a multitude of other skills and abilities are ways he can contribute to the classroom successfully.

In order to provide worthwhile activities, ask him to contribute materials, help to prepare charts, work on bulletin boards, and be a part of activity groups. He may help in planning and evaluating, building models, producing wood and soap carvings, and making and organizing collections.

If he can read at all, provide him with material at his level. If he cannot, help him to de-

velop a realistic attitude toward his problem. Talk with his parents: they should be concerned, and their support is essential if he is to accept himself.

Treat him with dignity. Offer him the hope, through your faith in him, that he has much to contribute to and enjoy from life. Point out that we all have deficiencies. Class discussions are good when they help him understand that he is not the only one with problems.

Show him, preferably by example, that it is important to develop good manners.

What can we hope to gain if we do we all these things for our non-readers? We can hope to provide society with mature, self-respecting young adults who will find a place for themselves in the community.

What we lose if we fail to provide help for them is even more dramatic! If we ignore them, let them stagnate or mark time until they are old enough to drop out of school, we are adding to the number of citizens who possibly will become delinquents, permanent names on the welfare rolls, or the future slum inhabitants. At the very least, they will evaluate the school system in the light of their own latest experiences. They will probably grow up to cause compounded problems for teachers when their own children are in school!

(Jessie C. Blank is Coordinator of Reading Services for the Wayne Community School District.)