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ABSTRACT

There are many ways guidance counselors can help teachers achieve more optimal reading instruction. Counselors first may have to ascertain the kinds of problems faced by a student in learning to read. Assessing a student's ability to use picture clues to decipher words may be necessary with primary grade students. Knowledge about phonics, using context clues and syllabication may all be helpful with older students. Since there are very strong advocates for phonics instruction, it is important for guidance counselors to understand arguments for and against its use. There are numerous ways students demonstrate learning gains and guidance counselors need to advocate for changes in how students are assessed. Just using one test is inadequate to determine a student's ability or learning difficulties. The portfolio approach stresses use of evidence from daily classroom work as part of the assessment. The portfolio helps show the counselor and the teacher how the learner reveals reading achievement. These suggestions offer guidance counselors ways to assist teachers in developing a quality program of developmental reading. (Contains 11 references.) (JDM)

THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR AND THE READING CURRICULUM

Marlow Ediger

Reading instruction and student achievement therein certainly is receiving much attention in the media. Students are to read on grade level as a minimum. This does not mean an average for all, but for the individual student. Reading Today (June/July, 2001) reports that the latest NAEP sees little change in the past eight years. Thus for fourth graders, the average scale score result for 2000 was 217 -- the same score fourth graders achieved in 1992. In 1994, the average score dipped to 214, and recovered to 217 in a 1998 survey. However, the gap between the highest and lowest performing fourth graders has widened since 1992. In that time, the 90th percentile score rose from 261 to 264, and the 70th percentile from 242 to 245, but the 10th percentile dropped from 170 in 1992 to 163 in 2000.

There are a plethora of statements which may be made questioning the statistical data presented above, including the following:

1. longitudinal data should be used whereby the initial group of fourth graders was followed up in succeeding grade levels (Longitudinal studies) rather than having different fourth graders each year, called cohort studies. Thus, one year's fourth graders will differ in achievement from a different school year.

2. there is always a problem with national tests such as the NAEP in that there are validity factors. The test will not be equally/equivalently valid for the fourth graders tested. Reliability factors are not mentioned.

3. the study does not mention a standard of error in that an average can vary or an individual score can vary due to errors/weaknesses in test development. Human beings do write tests.

4. percentiles indicate rank order and the rankings may be very close such as the top score, the next best score, and so on down the ladder. With scores being close together in rank order, the differences may be small indeed, especially when the Standard Error of Measurement is considered.

5. gaps are very difficult to eliminate/minimize in reading achievement. While working on my Doctorate 1961-1963, the prevailing educational literature then stated that the gap in achievement would grow greater because top achievers would tend to continually achieve at a more rapid rate as compared to the slower learners. Not much was said then about cultural differences such as minorities who have grown up in limited economic benefits. Teachers need to have each student achieve as much as possible in reading. This would help to take care of gaps as far as problems in reading achievement are concerned. Optimal student achievement in reading would then become the ideal (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Ten).

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The Guidance Counselor And Reading

There is much that a guidance counselor can do to assist teachers in helping students to achieve more optimally in reading instruction. Selected problems faced by public school students deal with lacking reading skills and abilities. The guidance counselor is well aware of pressures for students to measure up to higher student expectations in reading, along with other curriculum areas. High state mandated standards for student to achieve may indeed make it difficult for students to cope. In an article entitled, "A Quiet Crisis: Unprepared for High Stakes," (Education Week, April 18, 2001), the following quote appeared:

Despite the intensive push, bringing all Putnam, Massachusetts tenth graders who took the exam last year, 94% failed the English section, 95% failed mathematics, and 91% fell short on the science test.

Similar scenarios are playing out all around the country, as the drive to hold secondary students to more rigorous academic and tests reveal a quiet crisis. A large proportion of students who are already in high school are not yet ready to do high-school level work.

From the above quote, the author is not certain if the test is much too difficult or if the students are not ready to do high school work. He is inclined to feel that the test is too difficult. Be that as it is, students are being required to achieve at a much higher rate than prior times due to the state mandated testing era of the past five years. What is the role of the guidance counselor in reading instruction? When conferring with students, he/she needs to ascertain the kinds of problems faced by a student in learning to read and achieve in the reading arena. These might well include one or more of the following:

*** using picture clues in context to ascertain an unknown word. Picture clues in library and textbooks may be heavy on the primary grade levels, in particular. Thus, a student may be unable to identify a word, but by looking at the picture on the same page, the student is able to choose the correct word for reading content.**

*** using phonics. The unknown word may be recognized through associating, for example, the initial consonant of that word with the proper sound. Ending sounds tend to be more complex to sound out with the rest of the unknown word, but when ready, the student can receive help in decoding by associating the ending symbol with the correct sound.**

*** Using context clues. A student may be stuck in reading content until he/she determines the unknown word in context, by relating the known with the unknown, The word in context must make sense with the rest of the words in the sentence being read.**

*** syllabication abilities. If a student does not recognize a word in context while reading, he/she may divide the word into syllables and then**

recognize what was thought to be an unknown word. The author when supervising student teachers in the public schools noticed that common syllables recognized aid students to immediately identify the unknown. For example, the prefix “un” is a very common syllable that students need to understand meaningfully. The syllable “un” means not and is so common to a plethora of words such as uncommon, unimportant, unlike, uneven, unseen, and untie. Students may well increase reading skills by learning major prefixes and suffixes. Thus, if a student does not recognize the word “untie,” he/she may immediately identify “tie” by removing the prefix syllable “un.” By realizing that many words are easy to identify with knowledge and skills in syllabication, students realize that the unknown really is the known word with syllabication use (See Ediger, 2001, 246-251).

The following phonic rules in word recognition, perhaps, should be minimized:

* when two vowel letters join together, the first does the talking. Why? There are too many exceptions to this “rule,” such as heart, pear, tear in “tear the paper,” bear, and hair. These words are in common usage. Certainly, there are two vowel letters which come together sequentially in a word and the first letter makes the long vowel sound and “does the talking” as in boat, meat, heat, and seat, but there are many exceptions to this rule.

* when the “oi” letters come together, the first vowel letter makes its own sound; rather, a unique sound is made with “oi” joined together such as in the words boil, oil, and soil, which pattern in sound with oyster.

Caution is to be emphasized in teaching phonics or sound/symbol relationships to students. For example, notice the many ways of spelling the “oo” sound as in the word moon; two, to, too, dune as in “sand dune,” through, jewel, rule, and rheumatism.

Then too, notice the many sounds made by the same letters as in the “ough” sequence in spelling: cough, rough, through, bough, thought, and dough (See Ediger, 1999, 3-11).

English is a difficult language when attempting to unlock words through phonetic analysis, as noticed in the cautions listed above. Up to a point, phonics can be very valuable, as a tool for students to use, in unlocking new words. There are letters which are quite consistent between symbol and sound. Among others, these include the following consonants: b, although there are a few silent b’s as in numb; d; f; h; j; l; m; n; p; r; s; t; v; w; y; and z. The following consonants possess more than one sound: c, as in can and as in cent; g, as in go and gentle; and k, as in kettle, and being silent as in knight. The letter “q” tends to be

followed by the letter "u." The letter "x" makes the "eks" sound.

In conferences with students, the guidance counselor may have learners read aloud to notice if the latter is going overboard in using phonics to unlock unknown words such as attempting to use the soft "c" sound when the hard "c" sound should be used.

Vowel sounds may truly cause more problems as compared to consonant sounds when students are reading, since there basically are only five letters -- a, e, i, o, and u. For example, each of these five letters may make a long as well as short vowel sound: short a, as in apple, and a long vowel sound as in bake.

Why is a study of phonics important to guidance counselors?

1. there are very strong advocates of phonics instruction, especially for the elementary school level. The state of California even has a law that designates phonics must be taught thoroughly!

2. there is much pressure for all students to read on grade level. A lack of phonics instruction has been blamed for poor student reading achievement. No doubt, the guidance counselor will have increasingly more referred students who indicate tension, anxiety, and behavioral problems due to not meeting district or state standards in the testing and measurement era. The curriculum area of reading, the first of the 3rs, will receive primary stress in having students measure up and achieve on grade level.

3. there will be increasing pressure put on all professionals in the public school setting to up student achievement. High stakes testing and measuring is in vogue and different states are emphasizing exit exams which high school students need to pass before receiving a diploma. There is even a movement for students to pass a state mandated test before being promoted to the next sequential grade level. President George W. Bush is advocating all public school students be tested in grades three through eight and grade ten to monitor student achievement. Guidance counselors do need to assist and are in a good position to do so to help learners do well in reading achievement.

4. there, no doubt, will be an increasing number of students who have failed a test and are then required to go to summer school. After school tutoring and classes may be held to remedy deficiencies in reading and other curriculum areas. With drill and rote learning sessions to up test scores, more pressure will be placed upon school personnel to have students do well in testing situations (See Ediger, 1975, p 4).

5. there are numerous ways to assess reading achievement in addition to testing procedures which ideally should be emphasized. Reading multiple choice test items involves verbal intelligence (Gardner, 1993) with additional intelligences being

* using visual/spatial intelligence such as in art products developed by students to reveal what has been learned in a lesson or

unit of study.

* using logical/mathematics intelligence as in thinking logically to indicate learnings.

* musical/rhythmical such as writing and putting lyrics to music involving subject matter acquired to show achievement.

* Intrapersonal intelligence involves individual endeavors to indicate achievement. The strength of the learner is to work by the self, not within a committee.

* Interpersonal intelligence in which collaborative learning is stressed and learners have strengths within a group to reveal what has been learned.

* bodily/kinesthetic whereby physical dexterity and neuromuscular skills are utilized to indicate that which has been learned.

* scientific intelligence in which objective thinking is used, not subjective knowledge, to indicate what has been learned.

Thus, there are numerous ways in which a student may indicate learnings gained based upon the intelligence(s) possessed. For example, in using visual/spatial intelligence for those who excel in this area, the student, instead of responding to multiple test items in a state mandated test, may indicate the same subject matter achievement by doing a mural, one or more pencil sketches, a construction project including dioramas, among other artistic endeavors. Or with musical/rhythmic intelligence as a preferred way of learning, the student may write poetry and place the resulting lyrics in musical notation. The lyrics may well contain the same/similar content as was contained in the multiple choice test items; however, the learner is approaching assessment from the perspective of his/her strengths or intelligences, not from the perspective of verbal intelligence only which is used in test taking (See Ediger, 1996, 1-5).

The guidance counselor, along with other school personnel, need to be advocates of change and reform in the assessment process. One type of assessment such as state mandated testis is not adequate. Instead, multiple sources of evaluation should be used. However from state mandated test results, the guidance counselor may notice the following for a student:

1. how well the student is doing in phonics to unlock unknown words in reading.
2. the quality of student reading comprehension such as in obtaining factual knowledge, concepts, generalizations, and main ideas.
3. the student's ability to think critically.
4. creative thinking skills of the learner.
5. problem solving to solve dilemma situations.

The Portfolio Approach

Portfolios are used in selected states, such as Vermont, to assist in assessing student achievement. The portfolio stresses using evidence from daily classroom work of students which state mandated tests seem to ignore. Each day of school, the student reveals what has been learned. The student together with the teacher may choose what to place into a portfolio for the former. Portfolios then emphasize the following:

- 1. products and processes from ongoing lessons as well as units of study in reading.**
- 2. samples of art work, construction activities, and illustrations drawn as they pertain to student comprehension in reading.**
- 3. snapshots of student work in helping to develop interest centers in reading within the classroom setting (See Ediger, 1964, p. 13).**
- 4. data pertaining to library books read in a month or semester.**
- 5. a video-tape of the involved student working cooperatively with others on a committee reading project. The video may also show the student participating in dramatizations and pantomimes based on content read.**
- 6. classroom and school awards received by the student in assemblies, contests, and within the curriculum.**
- 7. charts, graphs, and tables drawn by the student to indicate comprehension of subject matter read.**
- 8. written outlines, summaries, reports, and conclusions covering what has been read across the curriculum.**
- 9. cassette recordings of oral reading, oral book reports, and the quality of collaborative endeavors participated in by the student.**
- 10. diary entries on peer mediated instruction in reading (Ediger, 1996, 45-55).**

By viewing a portfolio with the student, the guidance counselor may notice things such as the following:

- * how well the learner reveals reading achievement.**
- * strengths and weaknesses of the student in reading skills.**
- * quality of comprehension in reading as indicated through different procedures such as in written work, artistic endeavors, and drawings, among others.**
- * points of diagnosis and remediation in the reading arena.**
- * how to emphasize a forward looking reading curriculum (See Ediger, 2000, 45-55).**

Closing

The guidance counselor is a key person to improve the reading

curriculum. Students referred to the guidance counselor in many cases face problems in the curriculum. Much emphasis is being placed upon students achieving at much higher levels in reading as compared to five years ago. With state mandated tests and high cut off points for learner achievement, there is considerable pressure placed upon students to do exceedingly well in reading test scores. The guidance counselor may then assist teachers and administrators in developing a quality program of developmental reading whereby each student may achieve as optimally as possible (Ediger, 1993, 24-25).

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