Language-disabled students who have experienced difficulties in the process of language acquisition and who may show talent in some academic areas yet fail miserably in others are increasingly able to attend college because of "open door" policies. How will colleges traditionally rooted in textbook-centered lecture courses deal with the language-disabled student? Several possible program organizations exist that involve learning laboratories which provide diagnosis, remediation, counseling, and tutoring by both subject-area instructors and peers. A varied media format of instruction is suggested to meet a variety of learning styles. Services to the faculty in the area of group reading scores and evaluating textbook readability are suggested. Colleges should accept responsibility for the language-disabled student so that the "open door" does not become a "revolving door."
THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT

or

WHYCouldn't They Just Have Left Things As They Were

The Compensatory Effort in Higher Education

1A 1 This is Sam. Take a good look. You might not recognize him, but take a good look anyway.

1B 2 In a few years he's likely to turn up as a freshman on your campus.

2A 3 Or maybe he already has.

2B 4 Sam is an "LD"; he has a problem fashionably referred to as language disability or learning disability (take your choice).

3A 5 A language disabled student--a Sam--is one who, for one reason or another, has experienced difficulties in the process of language acquisition.

3B 6 Like Sam, he may show talent in some academic areas and fail miserably in others. He has a good mind, but he might excel in chemistry and hopelessly struggle through formal English with failure after failure.

4A 7 The Sams of this world irritate teachers. They sometimes earn a college degree (or two) without being able to compose a simple business letter or read a business monograph. And the public points an accusing finger at us.

4B 8 There are more Sams in schools than ever before.

5A 9 Why? No one really knows.

5B 10 McLuhan suggested a decline in the print culture. In any kind of competition with the "electric drama", reading does come in a rather poor second.

6A 11 In any case, changes in educational philosophy have made it possible for more and more Sams to graduate from secondary schools.

6B 12 In Texas, Plan A provides a special curriculum which offers success to LD's,

7A 13 and many of the LD's who have experienced such "success" are encouraged to try college.

7B 14 Someone has compared modern times with the Renaissance in terms of general and comprehensive change.
Changes are occurring in education, too, at a rate that is something less than phenomenal.

Most of us are familiar with the "open door". We don't need to be reminded that it beckons to all the Sams as well as the more traditionally endowed students.

Without arguing philosophy, we could probably all agree that every citizen has the right of access to public institutions--even the institutions of higher learning. Sam has the right to try.

With that in mind, consider the implications of another revolution in higher education: an attitude revolution.

The old ivy league concept was to flunk as many freshmen as possible.

Modern colleges strive to help as many as possible learn as much as possible.

The open door and the promise belong as much to Sam as anyone else.

The question is: What can we do for Sam beyond the magic door? Or what is being done for Sam beyond the magic door?

If you were able to ask the average Renaissance man how he felt about the changes that were going on around him, the chances are his response would be, "What changes?"

Many college instructors would also ask--"What revolution?" --"What changes?" Some of us are still looking at the present through the rear-view mirror.

But ignorance did not provide the Renaissance man with immunity to change. It won't insulate a modern college instructor, either.

Considering the evidence available, it's probable that LD's will be invading college campuses in such large numbers that traditional attitudes will be impossible to maintain.

Traditionally, higher education has been rooted in communication skills--textbook centered lecture courses.

The rear-view mirror keeps getting in the way.

No argument intended; traditional methods are certainly appropriate for many students. But what's to be done with the large numbers who have communications problems and have come to claim the promise?
"For new we see through a glass, darkly." There are no sure recipes for success, but it's certainly time to consider some of the possibilities.

Many colleges and universities have already quietly broken with tradition to offer formal remediation in reading and writing.

The community college, for the most part, has approached the question aggressively, very often through special divisions functioning under various names--Developmental Studies, Guided Studies, and so on, but the operations, regardless of the label, are basically remedial in nature, usually with a special concern for communication skills.

Typically, no one anywhere quite knows what to do with language disabled students, but they are sure to wind up in Developmental Studies (or whatever it might be called) as they are shuffled around on a campus.

In 1973, Dr. Melvin Howards of Northeastern University, Boston, said in a talk to a group of educators that he seriously questioned the possibility of remediating LD's at the college level.

But out of sheer necessity, we continue to try. The effort at Richland College in Dallas, Texas, is not unusual in its intensity, as community colleges go.

The reading program, for example, is a skills centered, totally individualized program.

Students are diagnosed in terms of specific reading skills, and a reading profile is drawn up for each student.

On the basis of the profile, a program is designed resulting in a contract concerned with the development of specific skills, and Sam begins to work with equipment and materials to "get at" weaknesses in a reading profile.

At the end of the process, students are retested, and, if necessary, recycled to strengthen skill development.

So what's new, you ask? Pretty ordinary stuff.

Well, the program may be somewhat unique at the college level in that it is rooted in a skills sequence, which is tied to a series of behavioral objectives, which are tied, in turn, to performance criterion tests--locally developed with mature students in mind.
When the classic "learning loop" of individualized education finally "snaps shut" under such circumstances, skill development has been mastered with some confidence.

The results of this program are "hopeful". It's appropriate to say that in deference to the tradition of scholarly caution.

In any case, with severely disabled college students, the process is, at best, a slow one--sometime a painfully slow one. But for Sam and the others like him, time has run out.

The last line was "lifted" from a "B" prison movie starring Humphrey Bogart. But in spite of its trite quality, it contains some truth.

For many disabled students, the "open door" is a "revolving door". Falling short of that mysterious status we call "average", LD's are forced to repeat developmental courses, such as reading, any number of times. Where would they go?

"If a student can't handle my textbook, he doesn't belong in my class!" That might be a history instructor, a biology instructor, a sociology prof. It reflects a fairly common attitude.

With all the possibilities exhausted, the Developmental Studies Program becomes the terminal effort for many students.

It is one of the tragedies of higher education that students with good minds reach a "blank wall" upon completion of Basic Reading 090.

There's no reason why the promise shouldn't be as valid in history or English or in biology or sociology as it is in developmental courses.

Since the problem is basically one involving communications disorders, a team approach seems to be suggested as a means of broadening the possibilities for disabled students.

Faculty services, as a facet of the Reading Program, hold the potential of defining the limits of the problem in rather specific terms.

At Richland College, for example, the character of faculty services is three-fold.

Upon the request of an instructor, a group reading test is administered to those classes selected by the instructor.

Test results are interpreted for students at a subsequent class meeting, and
the instructor receives a group data sheet which contains individual scores as well as group statistics such as mean reading level.

The second step involves textbook readability.

The Dale-Chall Readability Formula has been programmed for the computer in the Dallas County Community College District and a paraprofessional can analyze a typical textbook in an hour.

In the final phase, a reading specialist and the instructor meet to explore the implications of the information.

Confronted by the figures in a typical situation, it is difficult for even the most conservative instructor not to develop some sensitivity to the frustrations of disabled students. It would be an understatement to say that an occasional conscientious teacher is overwhelmed.

Given the information to work with, it is possible to offer help through realistic reading assignments, a change in emphasis away from a textbook, multiple adoption of textbooks, and so on. Few college instructors do any of those things, but in a dignified insurrection such as this, there is some obligation to point them out as possibilities.

Of course, every student is ultimately responsible for his own success or failure in school.

Learning, by its very nature, must be deliberate; one must want to do it.

Even a disabled student must recognize his strengths and weaknesses and be deliberate in his approach to school.

At Richland College, the Center for Independent Study—"Big CIS"—provides opportunities for realistic self-assessment as well as the development of skills.

The Center for Independent Study is an arm of the Developmental Studies Program offering informal services to students through a staff of professional instructors, paraprofessionals, and peer tutors.

Very nearly every major instructional and counseling program on campus is "plugged into" the Center, providing special expertise with both academic and psychological problems which seem to demand a team effort.

Certainly the Developmental Studies Division is an integral part of the self-help effort, providing consultant input in dealing with
38A reading disability,
38B writing problems,
39A and basic mathematics skills.
39B With that broad base of operation in mind, consider the potential of a "Big CIS".
40A A minute or so ago the necessity of a deliberate and realistic self-analysis was emphasized as a starting point for an LD student.
40B Through the Center for Independent Study a very useful tool which promotes self-assessment--cognitive mapping--is available without charge.
41A The cognitive map, developed by Dr. Joe Hill, employs computerized analysis of responses to a questionnaire to "map" a student's learning style.
41B A counselor is available to interpret the results in individual conferences.
42A Knowing his learning style, a student can make intelligent choices of whether to
42B read or
43A listen to tapes, or
43B see a movie
44A or select some other sensory approach in order to understand a concept.
44B Mapping of cognitive style may point out the possibility of difficulty with reading assignments in textbooks, or suggest, perhaps, a potential problem with lecture-based courses.
45A Weaknesses may then by further explored through diagnostic testing to assess reading and writing skills. Diagnostic tests are available on a voluntary basis although the program is flexible enough to permit instructor referral.
45B In either case, the reading and writing profiles resulting from these tests are interpreted on an individual basis by qualified specialists.
46A When these tests are requested on a group basis, by the way, the testing is coordinated by CIS.
Psychosensory testing--screening using audiometer and telebinocular--is available as needed by individual students.

Obviously, such diagnostic information would be totally useless without some avenue of follow-up.

A student who lacks basic reading skills or demonstrates specific weaknesses in reading should be offered the means for correcting that weakness. It's a part of the promise.

Minor problems can be handled on an informal basis with the student working on an independent basis under the supervision of staff reading specialists or Center staff.

Generally speaking, "drop-in" students need a little encouragement to complete independent projects. But fairly intensive one-to-one instruction is so appealing to most students that, if it is available from time to time, interest is not difficult to maintain.

Severely disabled students who turn up in this screening process are generally counseled into the kind of long-range developmental program described earlier.

In the mean time, the fact that, for many, basic credit courses must be dealt with on a day to day basis cannot be forgotten.

Meaningful, practical assistance can be offered to LD students for immediate application in content areas.

For example, CIS offers three possible approaches for individual tutoring.

The first, and most spectacular, is tutoring by professionals in a host of subjects--biology, chemistry, physical science, economics, writing, English, and speech, mathematics, and accounting. The service is free and is available on an appointment basis.

Group tutoring--peer group tutoring--is underway in history and English and will be expanded to other areas.

Finally, the Center operates a tutoring bureau which makes available qualified student tutors in most subject areas.

All tutoring services are free with the exception of student assistance for which there is an hourly charge payable to the student tutor.
The professional tutors, all of whom have bachelor degrees, at least, are sensitive to communications difficulties and frequently counsel with communications specialists concerning workable instructional techniques for disabled students.

Not infrequently sympathetic classroom instructors are deeply involved with disabled students and contribute in meaningful ways to a team effort.

These instructors can be found doing things like giving tests orally to students who do not have the writing and reading skills necessary to deal with a printed exam.

Out of a genuine human concern, some instructors will tailor assignments to take advantage of individual strengths and avoid bending an LD "completely out of shape".

Many textbooks, for example, have been recorded and are available on tape. Why wouldn't it be acceptable for a disabled reader whose chief learning mode is the audial mode to "read" his assignments by listening to tape?

A student who cannot read is functionally blind; he should be treated as a blind person while we attempt to develop the basic reading skills necessary for survival in the academic world.

In a traditional academic environment most academicians want no part of the problem. Flexibility in an instructor is treasured and sometime taken advantage of by those who are attempting to guide disabled students through the academic "games".

Although some wouldn't agree, there's really nothing illegitimate in offering informal counseling to assure the scheduling of classes with flexible instructors; it's part of the team effort--part of the "game".

Nor is it heresy to crusade for alternative modes of instruction on the college level. As a matter of fact, if you take a look at your neighbor, you might find that it is already being done next door.

At Dallas Baptist University, the entire freshman curriculum has been computerized/"media-ized" in a highly successful experimental program.

A sign of things to come? Perhaps. More and more the medium is becoming "the massage".

The "medium is the massage" for LD's, too. In fact, media based instruction is sometime the "yellow brick road" for those students who lack some of the basic communication skills.
Instructional TV tapes are available at Richland College on a limited basis as a "spin-off" of the District's instructional TV program.

The tapes may serve as a supplement to or in place of the telecasts which are scheduled on the local educational TV station.

In addition, the Center houses an "auto-learn" chemistry program, which is a self-paced filmstrip-tape "package", slide-tape psychology program used as supplementary material in regularly scheduled psychology courses, and a variety of miscellaneous video-tape, audiotape, slide-tape, filmstrip programs, dealing with various subject matter areas.

Much instructional material has been produced locally with local needs in mind and an overriding concern for effective communication of important concepts in a media base.

All of this does not suggest the abolition of scholarship, nor has there been any attempt to "bury" the printed word. Print is alive and well everywhere, but especially in higher education. To ignore that fact would be foolish and unrealistic.

It should be apparent that in the approach outlined here there is a great deal of concern for the development of those skills which are associated with education traditionally: reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Until there is a radical change in the whole "scene" in higher education, students, even LD's (or maybe especially LD's) will find tremendous advantage in knowing how to function efficiently in an academic environment.

Study skills is a high priority concern in dealing with disabled students, and it is safe to assume that they have had little or no formal instruction in that area.

At Richland a thirty-hour program has been developed to offer students practical approaches to becoming a deliberate student. Each session is media-based with appropriate involvement activities incorporated into the experience.

The program consists of a series of fifty-minute presentations which might be appropriately labeled "workshops" covering such areas as...
Students may experience the program in one of three ways: in a developmental studies reading class where one-third of class time is devoted to instruction in study skills;

individually using packaged programs through the Center for Independent Study;

or through a "crash" study skills course offered free on an open class basis to all students who feel the need to become involved.

The "crash" program runs a full semester. Any participant is free to attend any number of sessions; there are no formal enrollment requirements.

Throughout this discussion a kind of "system" has been implied for dealing with language disabled students.

If a system is there, it is certainly a loose, informal one. Such informality can be a disadvantage.

For a moment, then, let's take a look at the means by which an effort such as that at Richland College might be strengthened.

Materials are always a problem and on the college level there is a great need for the direct expression of important concepts in several levels of difficulty in terms of readability and learning style.

Ideally, these concepts would be available in several formats including a media format to offer broad appeal to a variety of learning styles.

To complete the picture, such an information bank would be enhanced by an instructional program involving sequential skills and performance criterion based evaluation.

Since the learning style of a good many students is supported by one-to-one instruction, the addition of support help--part-time professional tutors--for all courses on campus would be an advantage.

Linguists have been telling us for years that all the language skills are interrelated. That seems to suggest that remediation might be most effectively handled through a comprehensive team effort involving the combined expertise of a reading specialist, a writing specialist and perhaps others. It would certainly be valuable to determine the effect of a speech pathologist in a compensatory program.

A comprehensive program would probably also operate on a tighter, more highly structured base to achieve a higher level of efficiency.
Assuming that is a valid supposition, two needs become immediately apparent. The first is the necessity to add to the staff a specialist in communications disorders who would have the expertise to offer instructional support.

provide referral service as needed, and coordinate the total effort.

The second, and most important of all, is the need--no, the necessity--for a formal curriculum structure which provides a student in a compensatory program some possibilities beyond Developmental Studies courses.

Administration, staff development personnel, and instructional leaders must all become involved if fulfillment of the promise of higher education is to be extended to the Sams in our colleges.

After years of the frustration of "blank walls" and dead-end streets in public education,

it's time to stop giving lip service to terms like "individualizing instruction", "personalizing education", "humanizing education" and start doing something about them--even in higher education.

Sam asks no more than that we meet his needs.

As a human being he deserves that; we are obliged to continue to try--even in higher education.

You were warned. Nobody has all the answers. There have been few answers here. Lots of questions have been raised though. The questions follow the promise.

And the questions will have to be answered--finally, ultimately--even in higher education.