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Neil T. Glazer

Quaboag Regional High School, Warren, Mass.

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READING DEFICIENCY AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS: A STUDY

Neil T. Glazer

PRINCIPAL, QUABOAG REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, WARREN MASSACHUSETTS

Early in the 1973 school year, original research was conducted in a New England public school concerning the relationship between reading deficiency and disciplinary problems. A description of the research design and the results of the project were published in the *Journal of the New England Reading Association*. Since that time further studies have been conducted using a more sophisticated research plan and an expanded statistical analysis of the results. Even more significant than the continued research in the relationship between reading and behavior is longitudinal aspects of the study; the students that participated in the original 1973 study are now eligible for high school graduation. The follow-up on their progress is significant in light of the work done to remediate their learning deficiency and help them become better adjusted to school.

The Original Study

Accurate records were kept of all students sent to the Office for Disciplinary Infractions, problems ranged from simple truancy to the more severe problems of delinquency. Each student was given the Gates-MacGinitie Test and the results recorded. At the end of the semester one hundred students had been referred to the office. The vast majority of the students scored well below grade placement in reading, eighty-nine of the one hundred were performing below grade placement with the mean reading 2.2 years behind. Only eleven of the students performed at or above grade placement on the Gates MacGinitie.

The students were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group received individual and small group instruction in reading a minimum of twice a week with either a member of the professional staff or a university tutor. The control group continued in regular classes without special help in reading.

At the same time a rating scale was developed to measure and classify the different types of behavior problems in the school; the behavior could then be quantitatively measured for students in both the experimental and the control groups. During the experimental period accurate records were kept on both the behavior of each child and the progress made in reading. At the conclusion of the research project, a complete statistical analysis was made for the behavior and reading achievement for individuals in both the experimental and control groups.

Statistically, it was indicated that the experimental group improved in reading. This was established by administering the Gates-MacGinitie as the post test and comparing reading scores. At the same time, those students in

the experimental group experienced a greatly diminished misbehavior pattern. Only a small number of the students were referred to the office, and those who were sent for discipline were referred for violations considered less severe. The control group was post tested using the Gates-MagGinitie and their behavior statistically examined. It is interesting to note that their reading did not improve and at the same time, the behavior of the students continued to be disruptive despite the traditional efforts to remediate the misbehavior. The research indicates that there is a relationship between reading and discipline problems in the school, and that when the reading deficiency is remediated, it has a direct effect on the behavior of the student.

In conclusion it was felt that schools should follow the example set by the medical profession in dealing with health problems. Certainly, little progress would be made if physicians would treat only the symptom of the disease and show no concern for the cause. Educators are concerned with the increase in discipline problems in the public school, the last two Gallup polls of concerns in education clearly indicate the national problem in controlling students. The poll listed discipline as the number one concern. Educators are attempting to deal with the symptom of the problem but few have given serious thought to the cause. If we are to ever improve public education we must examine and remediate the cause of misbehavior.

Longitudinal Aspects of the Study:

The majority of the students who participated in the original study are now eligible for high school graduation. It is of great interest and importance to follow these students through their educational career. If the original study is to have an impact on schools, it must be shown that students who tend to read at or above grade level and are well adjusted in their behavior will be more successful and eventually graduate. The following is the statistical breakdown of the progress made by students from the original study. It should be noted that those in the original control and experimental groups did not receive special attention in reading after the conclusion of the research project. The original random sample of students was used as a means of comparing the reading and behavior of the total school population to the group referred to the office.

From the data, it is apparent that educators can make some rather accurate prognoses concerning students early in the student's school career. The research for this project involved students in grades seven and eight, from the results of the longitudinal study it is apparent that those students who experienced difficulty in both reading and behavior in the early years of junior high did not graduate from high school and conversely, those who were not referred to the school disciplinarian and were reading at or above grade level were successful in completing high school. Of the students in the original 1973 study, 54% of the children identified as having disciplinary and reading problems did not graduate while only 13% of the random sample of students from the same school did not graduate.

This type of information is extremely important for everyone involved in

Progress by 1977	Original Student Population 1973	
	Disciplinary/Reading Group	General School Population
Graduated	10%	33%
Dropped Out	54%	13%
Transferred	3%	8%
Still in Attendance	28%	43%
No Information	4%	1%

education. If indeed, we can accurately diagnose problems early in a child's career, then we should be able to remediate the causes and help students to remain in school. Naturally we as educators can not remediate all of the problems relating to poor reading and behavior, there are many socio-economic and personal problems which go beyond the school; however, this research clearly indicates an area where we do have the expertise and manpower to make significant changes. What then is the prognosis for students with reading and behavior problems? The data is explicit in predicting the future of the student with the above problems; they will drop out of school long before graduation time. If we can predict the future success or failure of the individual, then we must be capable of changing the future for those headed towards failure. What we need is a concentrated effort in reading for all students and particularly those who are in secondary schools and still having difficulty with reading and behavior.