

# A Reading Center Program in Action

WHEN all "eyes" begin to focus on reading problems, and all "eyes" are in favor of action, the time is at hand for development of the local reading clinic. To discover why this happens, when it happens, and what happens, we can look at a place "where it has happened" —Livonia, Michigan.<sup>1</sup>

## A Need Matched by An Idea

Eight years ago, two related but discrete facts focused attention on a search for a "new" solution to some plaguing problems in reading instruction.

First, many children were observed with severe reading difficulties; children, who were not mentally dull, but who lacked reading skills. Actually 300 students in the elementary grades in the school system were identified as able to profit from special help in reading, and at least 20 percent of the secondary students in the system were found to be in need of systematic reading instruction.

Second, it was observed that many teachers in the elementary schools and in

the junior high schools in the system were limited in ability to diagnose reading difficulties and in knowledge of what to do after diagnosis had been made. The situation was recognized as not being unique to the Livonia schools; other systems as well were confronted by the problem.

Remedial class instruction, in-service education, and research in new approaches to teaching reading were discovered to be major solutions tried and found helpful by other school systems. After weighing these alternative solutions, the Livonia school system decided to try a combination of the three major approaches in combating reading disability.

To implement this basic decision, the idea of a Reading Center was developed. It was recommended that at least two classrooms in a school be devoted exclusively to the establishment of a Center. This space would be used for in-service workshop-type seminars, remedial instruction, and the display and storage of materials in the field of reading. Office space was asked for a professionally trained director and an assistant.

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment should be given to the following individuals for their assistance: Paul E. Johnson, Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Instruction, Livonia Public Schools; and Paul G. Lutzeier, Director of School-Community Services, Livonia Public Schools, Livonia, Michigan.

The Center's program, as outlined initially, still operates. Tenure teachers are encouraged to apply for several weeks' training at the Reading Center. Carefully selected substitute teachers take over the classrooms of the teachers who are selected to attend the Reading Center. The time at the Reading Center is devoted to directed exploration of professional materials in reading, intensive training in diagnosis of reading difficulties, application of remedial techniques of teaching reading, and analysis of better ways to organize and plan for a balanced reading program in the classroom.

Pupils are transported by bus to the Reading Center. Teachers attending the workshop sessions provide instruction for one student at a time. On this basis, approximately 45 to 50 teachers per year are trained, and the same number of boys and girls receive help to overcome reading disabilities.

### The Reading Center Program

Today the Reading Center program is characterized by four features: Identification, Instruction, In-service, and Implementation. To carry out this program, the system's reading staff has been expanded to include six elementary reading teachers for the 30 elementary schools, one reading teacher for each junior and senior high school, and a Coordinator of Reading Instruction. The Coordinator, in cooperation with the special reading teachers, building principals, and system administrators, helps to maintain the focus of the reading program.

#### *Identification*

The first target is to identify any pupils in need of special remedial assistance in reading. The identification process is con-

ducted each spring and fall. In May, classroom teachers nominate a list of pupils they believe could profit from remedial reading instruction. This list is analyzed by the respective building principals and the special reading teacher.

The criteria for instructional eligibility are that a pupil must be in the 90-plus range of intelligence and be at least one and one-half years below grade level if he is a third grader, and be at least two years below grade level if he is a fourth through sixth grader. Students in the lowest quartile of reading ability in the junior and senior high schools, as measured by standardized testing and informal reading techniques, are candidates for special instructional classes.

Cumulative folders on candidates are reviewed by the remedial reading teacher responsible for the respective building. In September and October of the following year, the remedial reading teacher administers informal reading inventories and/or the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty in order to determine specific weaknesses in the children's reading abilities. The remedial reading teacher then discusses each candidate with the principal in terms of whether the child can better benefit by a well-planned program of instruction in the regular classroom, or whether remedial group work would be a better approach to the problem.

After this decision is made, the remedial reading teachers establish their class schedules. They also work with the classroom teachers to plan a program for their pupils accepted for remedial reading classes. This follow-up with classroom teachers insures correlation between classroom activities and remedial reading activities. The remedial reading teachers also plan with regular classroom teachers for those students who need some remedial help but who can benefit

most from instruction in the regular classroom setting. Direct instruction in remedial classes begins about the middle or latter part of October.

### *Instruction*

The instruction that is provided in the elementary remedial classrooms, and their counterpart Reading and Composition classrooms at the high school level, is as varied as the individual needs of children. Vocabulary improvement materials, basic reading skills study texts, workbooks, reading kits, laboratories, and libraries are some of the many materials used for instruction. Training films to aid in the development of reading skills are employed as well as are various audio-visual training devices.

Both group and individual instruction are part of the program. Pupils are encouraged to establish their own goals and objectives, to keep records of their progress, and to evaluate their own growth. Old-fashioned praise for solid accomplishment still is found to be a most valuable teaching tool. Standardized tests and informal measures are used in the overall evaluation of instruction, but only for purposes of diagnosis and remediation. Pupils in the remedial reading program are evaluated only in terms of their own goals and objectives.

### *In-service*

Since the inception of the Livonia Reading Center concept, the program has never deviated from its conviction that attack on the problem of reading disability must be "two-pronged." Direct work with students in need of remediation is essential, but helping teachers provide classroom instruction conducive to improved reading skill development

is just as necessary. Several approaches to in-service education are used.

One major type of in-service education is the workshop program. Teachers, released full time from their classrooms, attend the seminars and work with the Coordinator of Reading Instruction to build resources of knowledge and material for use in their classes. In addition, these teachers study pupils' cumulative folders, administer interest inventories, and complete a thorough diagnosis of one student. They then plan an individual remedial program based on the diagnosis, and prepare a diagnostic report on each pupil for the classroom teacher and the parents.

Other in-service approaches include preschool conferences for beginning teachers; Saturday morning workshop sessions for interested teachers and principals; special summer workshops for preparation of reading and composition teachers at the secondary level; Curriculum Day presentations for elementary, junior high and senior high teachers; and classroom demonstration lessons. Activities are geared toward fulfilling the objectives of the Reading Center:

1. To help teachers better understand the nature of the learning process and the reading process
2. To help teachers gain a clearer understanding of the goals of the reading program
3. To help teachers become familiar with professional and instructional materials in the area of reading
4. To help teachers gain skill in administering and interpreting formal and informal diagnostic tests to determine pupils' strengths and weaknesses in reading
5. To help teachers gain skill in planning, organizing and implementing a reading program for group and individual instruction to meet the wide range of individual differences

6. To help teachers gain skill in identifying and teaching reading skills in the various content areas

7. To help teachers understand the developmental sequence of skills in reading (word analysis, comprehension, work-study, rate, etc.).

The teachers who attend the Reading Center workshops act as resource people for reading in their respective buildings. Workshop materials are geared to provide them a ready source of reference in answering questions for their co-workers.

Those teachers who have attended the Reading Center seminars, and any other interested teachers, including those from local school systems or universities, visit the Reading Center and are welcome to study the many materials developed at the Center for instructional purposes. Most of the materials available at the Center are not copyrighted, so they may be reproduced by the interested individuals for use in their own buildings or systems.

### *Implementation*

Each year has seen the Livonia Public Schools Reading Center extending its facilities to implement its services. The concept of the remedial reading teacher has evolved during the years to include not only direct remedial instruction, but also work with classroom teachers on a follow-up basis.

The Reading Center in-service concept has broadened to encompass exploration and research in the field of reading. For example, the Coordinator and her staff of reading teachers have begun a program of intensive study relative to innovations in the area of reading. Each reading teacher investigates current studies using varied techniques, sharing their studies with principals and

administrative staff. Data obtained from these studies can be analyzed in the belief that children may be identified who will meet greater success if channeled into specific programs of reading instruction.

The Reading Center staff recently initiated a program of one-to-one remedial reading instruction. They are analyzing the value of one-to-one relationship as compared with group instruction. They hope to discover some key to a better method and procedure for remedial instruction.

Student teachers from nearby universities have been invited to visit the Reading Center accompanied by their supervisors. A discussion period is scheduled for such visits to describe the Reading Center program. Livonia endeavors to be of assistance to near-by universities in providing information about the teaching of reading and the materials needed for classroom use.

The Livonia Reading Center has met the needs of its community. Over the years the idea has expanded to embrace procedures useful to this rapidly growing suburban community. In order to maintain its impetus, the Reading Center must continue to be oriented toward the future. All those involved with the Reading Center program think in terms of improved services for the forthcoming years. What will the future hold for the Reading Center?—New approaches for secondary school reading instruction? Provision for clinical services? Use of television? Provision for parent education in the techniques of reading instruction?

All of these are possibilities for a young and growing community which is trying to provide the necessary services for continuous growth toward better education for the entire school community.

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