

*Association for Children
with Learning Disabilities* FEB 26 1968

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FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ACLD

Boston, Massachusetts

Saturday, February 3, 1968, 10:30 - 12:00

Bay State Room

Statler Hilton

Report of the Southwest Texas State College Research Conference on the Problem of Dyslexia and Related Disorders in Public Schools of the United States.

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REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON TEACHER PREPARATION

Those of us who planned the conference at Southwest Texas State College did so with full realization that there had been previous seminars and meetings of equally distinguished persons on the same subject. Infact some of our conferees had instigated or participated in these previous meetings. We were also aware of and determined to avoid if possible three nemeses which seemed to have plagued previous discussions of learning disabilities in children; namely the semantics of nomenclature, the espousing of etiology, and the buttressing of strongly held views about special methods and practices for remediation.

We were convened to draw up guidelines which would emphasize likely solutions rather than acknowledged complexities and difficulties of the problem. The conference was convened in the interest of children who cannot unscramble auditory and/or written symbols which reach the brain so that they have the same order-pattern and meaning which they have for others. It was recognized that there is no simple formula for teaching such children, that the task is complicated and arduous, calling for the combined efforts of many people.

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Since the presenting complaint of such children is overall academic deficiency, the problem is a serious one in the schools of the nation. Those of us engaged in the teaching of teachers have been frustrated by questions from our student teachers about what to do for and with such children. In all honesty we have had to say that we did not know what should be done. So we have had to watch in dismay as classroom teachers have turned understandably to pseudoscientific procedures based upon dogma, or at best upon research which is shockingly inconclusive. ^PRealizing the need for positive action, we awaited with special interest the thinking of the Working Group on Teacher Preparation. This group was composed of the president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the president of the Orton Society, the president of the Association for Childhood Education International, a representative from the American Educational Research Association who was also the director of a reading clinic, and a professor of special education in a large university. This group was charged with making an appraisal of what is needed for adequate pre- and in-service teacher training, and to prepare suggestions as to the curriculum for such training to the end that state departments of education, colleges, universities, and school systems might use the suggestions as guide lines. It is my pleasure to report to you at this time the views and recommendations from this group.

Their recommendations were based upon two important premises. First that there are at least five groups of personnel all of which at the pre-service level if possible, or at the in-service level if necessary, need some degree of professional preparation for dealing with the problem: 1. the elementary and secondary classroom teachers; 2. special education and remedial teachers who will work with children individually or in small groups; 3. coordinators such as supervisors, counselors, and school psychologists who work with parents, teachers, and community agencies; 4. college and university teachers of teachers; and 5. other personnel such as professional teachers of preschool children,

and teachers' aides.

The second premise was that while the degree and depth of preparation of the five groups of personnel may differ widely, each should have information, knowledge, and competency sufficient to enable them: 1. to recognize the difficulty, 2. to identify the problem, 3. to make appropriate referral for screening and potential diagnosis, and 4. to assist the child in continuous growth and development.

Upon the premises that all segments of the educational community should possess professional knowledge about the problem and a certain amount of competence in dealing with it five specific recommendations were made:

First that all preservice teachers, at the undergraduate level be required to learn about dyslexia and related learning disabilities, and that all have opportunities to observe and to do supervised teaching of disabled as well as normal pupils in learning situations.

Second that a small task force of knowledgeable persons should prepare a pilot report which would epitomize for this field: present knowledge, materials available, and techniques of corrective education; and would establish guidelines for an intensive resource unit. Such a pilot report could be used by college teachers in the preparation of current or new courses in learning disabilities, and in regular courses such as those in curriculum and methods in the teaching of reading. This pilot report could also be used as background material in workshops, institutes, and conferences for in-service teachers to be given by teacher education centers, by public schools, and by both in cooperation with each other. The report could also be used as a basic professional publication for national meetings, regional conferences, and state workshops.

Third that a national conference of some magnitude be held to call attention to the dimensions of this problem, to present known information, and to suggest

further steps to be taken. That representatives from relevant areas such as education, school administration, medicine, linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology, and state and federal agencies participate in such a conference. (It seems evident that the Fifth annual conference of ACLD is close to having become such a meeting. One has only to compare the programs of the first with the fifth ACLD conferences to note that the participation of various disciplines is expanding.) And yet to be done, that this national conference should encourage needed research so that the general quality of teacher training and pupil services in this area would be improved. Perhaps this is the recommendation most in need of implementation. Perhaps all of us who have become enthusiastic about special methods, materials, and approaches to the problem should restrain our enthusiasm and request that our programs be subjected to painstaking careful analysis, so that our claims may be realistically based upon true research.

And the fourth recommendation of the group was that the materials and findings growing out of the aforementioned pilot study and national conference be presented at the national conventions of relevant professional associations, such as: The American Association for College Teachers of Education, Association for Childhood Education International, International Reading Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Education Association, various medical groups, the Association for School Principals, at state and local conferences, and at the meetings of the 142 State Supervisors of Reading.

And fifth that grants be available to teacher education institutions, and to school systems, for the implementation of pilot programs, in-service training institutes, research and special training.

If these recommendations of the working group on teacher preparation could be implemented it is likely that a high percentage of children with specific *learning*

problems could escape the dilemma either of failing in a regular classroom of
agemates, or of being stigmatized with a special label of disability. For most
would be discovered early at the preschool level, and effectively taught by
various teachers all of whom would be aware of and relatively competent in
coping with the problem.