

OBTAINING AND USING PARA- AND NON-PROFESSIONALS TO
IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION, ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTITUDE

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The Problem

Significance of the Study

"No man can read with profit that which he cannot learn to read with pleasure." -- Noah Porter

The major goal of reading instruction -- the development of students who can read and who read often -- is not being totally reached by the traditional reading program. Among school-age children, the percentages of poor readers and drop outs are too great to allow satisfaction with the remaining good readers. Estimates of children with severe reading difficulties vary widely, but several authorities (Bakwin and Bakwin, 1966; Harris, 1961; Hallgren, 1950; Rabinovitch, 1959) have suggested between ten and fifteen percent of the elementary school population is reading at least two years below grade level.¹ A survey undertaken by the New York Department of Education in 1968 disclosed that approximately twenty percent of all sixth graders in New York are reading below minimum levels of competence; in the New York City public schools the figure rose to an astounding forty-four percent.² Figures from the foregoing survey though related to New York pupils, also indicated the proportion of students with reading problems in elementary schools across the country. Recent

national figures indicate drop-out rates of thirty-one percent from high school and three percent from elementary school.³ The drop-out rate among Kansas high school students is twenty-four percent.⁴ Nationally, only sixty-nine percent of high school students complete the twelfth grade.⁵

The foregoing estimates are only symptoms of the extent of reading retardation among students in reading programs. Vellutino contends that these figures make it imperative that educators intensify the search for innovative models and programs that will provide competent services for the largest number of children at the least possible cost. Investigations to determine the causes of reading retardation indicate that the solution to the problem may lie within restructuring the teaching approach, the use and kind of learning materials, and the classroom organization. Numerous reading specialists, both practitioners and theorists, concur that the solution to reading retardation is individualized reading instruction.

Statement of the Problem

The attempt to individualize reading instruction poses many problems for the teacher. The problems grow out of the need for smaller class sizes, more time for pupil-teacher conferences, time for preparation and professional growth, and reduction of routine matters. If the problems are solved through utilization of para- and non-professionals,