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## DECIDING TO COMPENSATE OR REMEDIATE WITH STRUGGLING READERS



**Abstract:** Learning to read is the predominant focus of reading instruction in grades 1-3, while in grade 4 and beyond, the focus is on reading to learn. In cases when a child cannot read at grade level and learns how to read when his/her classmates focus on reading to learn, teachers



are struggling to take informed decision and appropriate instructional method when students with reading difficulties reach a breakdown point. Namely, the dilemma is whether to try remediation as an approach or resort to compensation. This paper sheds light on the essential segments relating to these two major approaches.

**Key words and phrases:** remediation, compensation, learning strategies, instructional methods, learning difficulty, dyslexia/dysgraphia.

**Introduction:** When students, particularly those who learn differently, struggle, the most essential step is to analyze the source of the student's difficulty and confusion. It is called the breakdown point in the given task. The teacher then decides whether to provide remediation or compensation. Two questions are considered critical: where is the breakdown occurring i.e. what is the point where the student becomes confused or begins to struggle and what is the nature of the breakdown, including components of the task which are causing the confusion. The essential information helps determine where to intervene as well as which method is the appropriate one.

Two theorists (Cook & Hussey, 2002; King, 1999) have raised an issue usually brought up by parents. That is, how do we decide on the best course of action - remediation

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(additional instructional time, different instructional approaches) or compensation (recognizing that remediation has failed and that compensatory approaches are needed to produce the desired level).

### **Remedial instruction versus Compensation**

Remediation means intervention by the teacher, including reteaching of the skill using more concrete and alternative methods. By remediation methods, a teacher can adapt almost any material and intervene for most problems demonstrated by a student. Levine (1998, 574) summarizes the following list of possible remedial assistance: automatization of subskills and/or neurodevelopmental function, scaffolding, designing tasks that end at the breakdown point, separating breakdown points, staging, use of multiple formats, identifying strengths and affinities, modeling, use of strategies, directed retraining. Dyslexic students, although capable of learning skills and concepts, need to do so using alternate techniques. They respond best to multisensory methods and need to be presented with the developmental steps explicitly, not implicitly. The activities (Richards, 1999: 94) need to incorporate the three S's: structure, systematic and sensory. Forms of bypass include: rate modification, volume reduction, complexity adjustment, prioritization, curriculum changes, special devices, alteration of routines, formal shifts, feedback modification.

Compensations are also called bypass strategies, or accommodations. They bypass the problem and reduce the negative impact on learning. This usually includes avoiding the difficulty, changing the assignment or expectations, or using strategies to aid that particular aspect of the task.

Levine (1998:592) has identified nine formats to bypass problems encountered by students with learning difficulties, including: rate modification, volume reduction, complexity adjustment, prioritization, curriculum changes, special devices, alteration of routines, formal shifts, feedback modifications. However, modifications should not be embarrassing. Some students may respond comfortably if there is an established practice when it comes to the format of the assignments handed in.

Talking about educational practices, constructivist remediation as opposed to instructions approach is conceptualized on the basis of a set of interdependent and integrated components, generally focusing on identification and correction of skill deficits in a meaningful context. Remediation, when it comes to struggling readers is directed towards the following aspects: phonological processing, sight word vocabulary, and reading comprehension, from the aspect of authentic individual student assessment, and creating meaningful instructional contexts by means of whole pieces of literature, integration of literacy and language development, and enhanced student motivation through self-selected, functional learning activities.

Remedial instruction targets the foundational skills a pupil needs to master, in order to enable them to make progress with more advanced skills and concepts.

Remedial approaches tend to focus on repetition to help develop specific skills breaking tasks down into smaller chunks, reteaching skills and using a different teaching approach.

Many schools use computers to help provide remedial support, others recommend a summer program.

In cases when remedial instruction and the tools available have been exhausted, the next step includes compensatory measures, which as an approach looks for ways to build on the students strengths and work around weaknesses.

Audiobooks or text-to-speech software can represent alternative ways to access material at the student's grade level. It is an important tool to expand students vocabulary. An additional compensatory approach with children facing writing issues is the use of speech recognition software that converts students words to text.

However, resorting to compensatory approach does not necessarily mean that the child does not continue with remedial instruction. In fact, what is essential is finding the right balance between remediation and compensation.

A combination of both approaches is important based on an individual case. Remedial instruction addresses skills deficits, while compensatory approach enables students to achieve their full potential.

Schools that include IEP (Individualized Education Programs) consider provision of Assistive Technology they find necessary for the pupil in question. And some schools have an obligation to provide assistive technology services as well as training for the students, teachers and student's family.

There is much confusion about if and when compensation should be provided, as well as how much time and effort should be put on remediating reading before resorting to compensating.

There is no doubt that in case of struggling readers, we need to intervene early with an intensive, research-based instruction, in order to prevent widening further the gap with their peers when it comes to acquisition of new vocabulary and concepts through reading.

### **Available tools**

There is an array of tools teachers can use that will benefit many students. Specifying a clear learning objective, using a variety of instructional methods (auditory, visual, and hands-on) and allowing multiple ways of demonstrating mastery of the subject matter is a set of essential steps benefit many students with different learning styles. At the same time, it is important to know that no one tool works for every student. A trial period should be conducted, data collected, and an informed decision made. Color filter overlays is another tool. Highlighting text allows students to focus on key vocabulary and concepts. Printable picture/text – stories in picture are also helpful. Students can access reading material through audio or audio/visual means. These include audio books, electronic books with electronic readers, talking word processors, scan and read systems, and low reading/high interest books. Many sources of audio and audio/visual text are free or low cost and we will look at some sources for each.

Electronic books are very important for students with learning disabilities. Research shows us that having access to the curriculum through electronic books and materials not only gives students with learning disabilities access to the curriculum, it can improve reading fluency and comprehension. A portable e-book reader is another option. Electronic books can be downloaded. The screen shows the text and highlights the words as a synthesized voice reads the text.

We can reduce the volume of reading demands by using detailed summaries and study guides. There is a selection of age-appropriate narrative chapter books written at two readability levels and delivered in three media formats.

There is also assistive technology for writing. Other helpful tools include word processing software for students with learning disabilities comprising word prediction, anticipating ahead of time what word is needed and gives the user the possible choices, and word completion. Another possibility for generating writing is based on voice through speech-to-text software. For younger students there is a possibility for them to record their voice as an alternative to writing. Spelling support is provided by word processing software. When it comes to comprehension and retention of information in a coherent manner, positive learning outcomes can be achieved by the use of graphic organizers. Students create a visual map of their writing assignment, and guidance is provided for students in terms of adding details. Since searching the Internet for the purposes of the research paper can be very overwhelming for students with learning disabilities, there are search engines available which provide reduced selection and indicate the readability level of each individual website on the list.

### **Dilemmas between remediation and compensation**

The decision to remediate implies the assumption that the student is able to learn the skill and perform the task, and a different and more systematic approach to the learning is needed. Systematic techniques are needed to remediate and enhance learning for students who learn differently.

The decision to compensate implies the belief that the student is unable to learn the skill or perform the task efficiently at that point in time, or ever. It is necessary to create an alternate path. Among the typical examples is spelling because dyslexics generally fail to develop automatic and efficient spelling, so compensation in form of spell checkers for example encourages the use of more complex words while increasing spelling accuracy in the final product. In addition, even the students who learn to read efficiently, still remain slow in their reading rate and fatigue easily. Especially in high school and college, these students benefit greatly from having their textbooks on tape. This redirects their energy towards focusing on the primary task of comprehension and learning the concepts. A computer is a vital compensation for many dyslexic and dysgraphic students because it enables them to concentrate more on the content of their writing. When compensation is used it should not be understood that the basic task is avoided or ignored. The student with poor spelling should be helped to develop as many skills as possible. It would be detrimental even for the most severely dysgraphic students to totally avoid all writing. Students with poor reading skills need to continue to practice reading when their visual recognition skills improve, although they should primarily do so with fun books and magazines, rather than difficult textbooks when context is critical and the volume huge.

In fact, the primary goals of compensations is to provide a means by which the student can continue to progress and develop conceptually without being held back as a result of the learning disability. Part of the decision to compensate should be based on the end goals of the task. For example, if the aim of a specific test is to assess the knowledge of a particular content, it would be unfair to count off for misspellings when the student has a true problem with spelling.

Students should be allowed to move on conceptually, by compensating for unknown facts.

*Remedial strategies* help a student improve functioning in one or more areas through use of systematic techniques.

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*Bypass strategies* help a student deal with the problems that interfere with writing by going around the problem through use of different techniques or technology, or by providing compensations which alleviate the strain and increase the ease of reading and writing. The overall task of bypass strategies is to increase automatization (since it enhances active working memory) and still allow the student to participate in and benefit from the task. If a student, when it comes to writing, can easily manipulate the mechanics, he is free to focus on content.

However, what is important to be underlined is that student's inconsistencies and performance variables should be understood. If necessary writing assignments should be shortened, instead of all at once students should be allowed to do tasks in increments and logical steps via staging, and students should be encouraged to be patient with themselves, to be allowed to use their preferred style print or cursive, as well as resort to electronic resources.

### **Positive teacher - student relationship**

Students with learning difficulties experience frustrations throughout the academic tasks. It is critical that teachers should reinforce the student's efforts and focus on areas of success. The student should be supported in dealing with one subtask at a time, so that the student can feel he/she is successful with one small part of a task in cases when the entire task seems overwhelming. It is important to acknowledge the students' frustrations in helping them realize they are not dumb or strange. Students efforts need to be reinforced and the focus should be on areas of success. Students should learn strategies to decrease the feeling of being overwhelmed, by breaking the task into smaller units. The student should realize that by focusing on just one small part at a time, he can achieve success with that small part and then go on to the next smaller part. In addition, students need help to learn how to break a task into subtasks.

Among the most prominent teaching philosophies based on the Gillingham remedial program, the first multisensory reading program developed specifically for dyslexics (Gillingham, 1968) is to reinforce all successes and provide sufficient structure and intervention so that errors are kept to a minimum.

It is vital to maintain respect for the students avoiding embarrassment. Use of a secret signal between the child and the teacher can be employed and all discussions should take place privately. Demystification (Richards, 1999:93) should be continually used with students to reduce the mystery of what is going on while helping the students understand his/her own processing strengths and weaknesses. It can also help the students understand his/her own goals. It is regarded as a critical lifelong skill for any student who learns differently or struggles with some aspects of learning. It is believed that students need to be taught how to learn in order to succeed not only in the school environment but also throughout life in managing a job or home activities. Therefore, use of strategies is a critical step in teaching students to learn how to learn. According to Deshler (1996) strategy is a plan that not only specifies but also consists of critical guidelines and rules related to making effective decisions during a problem-solving process.

With encouragement and reinforcement of a specific strategy, students can learn to use aids that will help them preplan. Preplanning is one of the strategies that is underused by dyslexic students, and it is one of the compensations that will help them deal with typical poor time management problems. Examples should be incorporated, adjusted and elaborated to fit the student's age and experience level.

Input is needed for students so that they can deal with frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed, and discuss to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

### **Pedagogical implications**

Following should be taken into account prior to deciding on a specific approach and instructional method. To gain an overall perspective, awareness of these aspects of the teaching reality may contribute significantly to informed decision.

*Formative assessment* is a model that uses feedback from the continuous monitoring of the student's progress to identify learning strengths and weaknesses and to guide instruction, enabling teachers to recognize the needs of their students and plan accordingly.

*Response to Intervention (RTI)* is a framework for formative assessment that involves collecting data on a regular basis to make instructional decisions.

*Learning strategies* are techniques that maximize student strengths and provide structures that enable students to learn more effectively. Some examples of learning strategies include use of graphic or advance organizers, assistive software, mental rehearsal and visualization techniques.

Many students with learning disabilities demonstrate a tendency to compartmentalize their learning. Therefore, they often require guidance in integrating strategies broadly across a variety of situations. Most significant areas include: planning, thinking, studying, organizing.

*Potential Adaptations* include the following aspects:

*Learning Environment:* alternate space within classroom, alternative setting (e.g. resource room), reduced distractions (study station), adapted desk/table, cushions to sit on, acoustic equipment.

*Instructional Methods:* direct instruction and practice of study skills, visual aids to supplement, verbal presentations, verbal explanations of visual aids, break tasks into small steps, advanced organizers, peer tutors, cooperative learning, maintain consistent routines, extended time to complete assignments or tests.

*Response Formats/Assessment Procedures:* oral, dramatic or video presentations, visual formats (pictures, charts, graphs, diagrams), word processing, spell check, voice-to-text technology.

*Time Frames and Organizational Support:* additional time, reduced length of assignments, regular breaks, chunking assignments into modules, daily schedules, agenda books.

*Learning Materials/Resources:* manipulatives, large print, text readers, audio books, graph paper for math calculations, raised-line paper, erasable markers, headsets, calculators, talking calculators, duplicate notes, computer.

### **Conclusion**

***Teachers rely heavily on the options associated with remediation: Re-teaching the information, using alternative instructional strategies, breaking the tasks down into smaller parts to analyze what the child knows and what components are problematic, reducing the number of items that must be completed, additional practice, one-on-one tutoring, etc. However, reality shows that this approach has not always worked, i.e. not all the students reach the point when they can read independently. In addition, if there is no additional time***

*provided and traditional instruction has failed to produce acceptable levels of academic performance, the only other option is to explore the use of technology-enhanced performance (assistive technology).*

*Decision making in terms of the use of assistive technology needs to be an informed decision making. Professional guidelines are needed indicating that all avenues to teach a child have been exhausted prior to the introduction of assistive technology. Instructors need to know whether or not a child has the cognitive capabilities for learning the information, what alternative learning strategies have been employed to help the child master the content, whether direct instruction should continue while a child is taught the use of a performance aid. The use of assistive technology needs to be preceded by potential risks including the development of device dependency.*

*If a student needs books and educational material in an alternate format, it should be specified in the student's IEP. This will be especially important as the student moves on to higher education. The institution of higher education will not provide students with disabilities textbooks and educational material in an alternate format unless it is documented.*

*Regarding the dilemma remediation or compensation, the most sensible approach would be remediation versus compensation not to be viewed as either/or decision. Teams creating IEPs should determine the percentage of time needed to be devoted to compensation including assistive technology.*

*Teachers should work in teams and create corrective and remedial instructional plans for students with reading disabilities in various extents (mild to severe), considering their emotional, cultural and educational learning needs. Sociological, psychological and pedagogical instructional procedures should also be considered, and the overall contexts ensured: keeping student portfolios, collaborating with related support school personnel, conferring with parents, using community resources, and conducting classroom research.*

*Recenzente*

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