THE STARCROSS READING BOARD: A DYNAMIC AID TO READING.

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[Received April 20, 1945.]

ON studying the behaviour of mental defectives one cannot fail to note that their deficiency is not confined to the intellectual or emotional plane. They are clumsy not only in their way of thinking and reasoning, but also in their bodily movements. Their muscular co-ordination and their manual dexterity are poor; they are awkward in their rhythmic work, and they rarely reach average standard at games. Their ocular movements show much the same shortcomings. They are sluggish at following a moving object with the eyes, they easily lose sight of the finger which they should fixate, and they are equally clumsy when they are called upon to look at will at an object in the fringe of their visual field. In some feeble-minded defectives of medium or even higher grades this inability may be clearly reminiscent of motor apraxia in other spheres of neuro-muscular functioning. More often than not precisely these patients are found to be particularly backward readers, able to decipher short words only and incapable of grasping the meaning of a printed sentence.

These observations have been the starting-point for the elaboration of the Starcross Reading Board as a dynamic aid to reading. The Reading Board consists of a cardboard or plywood sheet 14 by 11 in. It is painted white and slotted by ten or twelve rows of horizontal lines as would be printed on a book page. The slots serve as leads for a sliding rod carrying a disc, which moves along them and is operated behind the board by the teacher. The discs carry the moving object, upon which the child has to focus his attention, inducing him to follow it with his eyes along the " lines " of the reading board. One side of the disc may carry the picture of a simple object, e.g. a bird. The disc is hinged on the upper end of the rod, and can be turned to its reverse side by a quick jerk of the teacher's hand. Its reverse side indicates the name of the picture shown in print, e.g. *bird*.

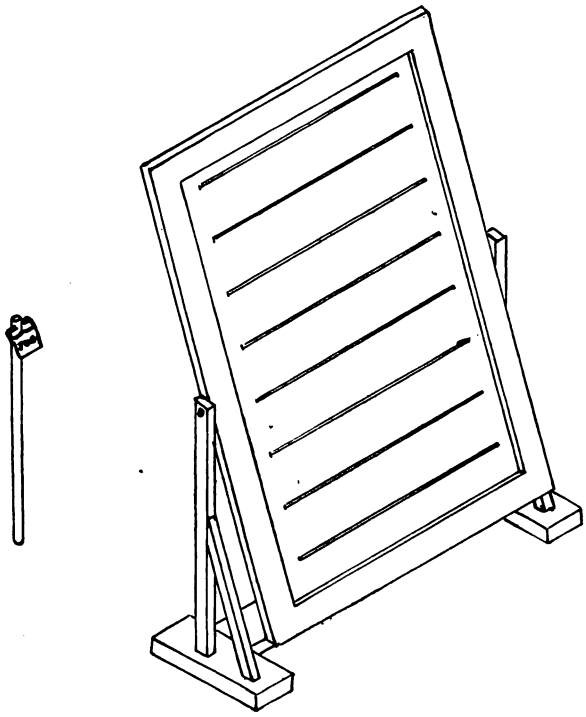
The child thus receives (1) a visual impression of the picture, (2) a visual impression of the corresponding word, and he is called upon to follow them with his eyes from the left to the right and from line to line much in the same fashion in which he has to learn to pursue the (static) pattern of words on a printed page. The teacher, seated behind the board, is in turn able to watch through the slots the eye movements of his pupil, to note when his attention flags, when he loses hold of the moving word or object, and to correct such shortcomings.

I may add a brief remark on the rationale of the method. I mentioned that it aims at encouraging the dynamic (motor) side of the reading process as opposed to its static (perceptual) side, which has so far been the only function to be systematically trained by the orthodox methods of teaching. But the fact is that both motor and sensory functions are inextricably fused in the complex automatism of reading, and it can well be assumed that the neglect of the former may be responsible for the deadlock reached by many backward readers who are unable to proceed beyond the stage of reading isolated words only, corresponding to Burt's six or seven year level of reading.

The Reading Board has been used at our Special School during the past year by our teaching staff, and it is too early to try to assess the results achieved. However, I learn from our headmaster, Mr. R. Ward, that the method seems to promote

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.91.385.523 Published online by Cambridge University Press

visual attention, that it stimulates the interest of the pupil, as is shown by the better retention of the word patterns presented on the Reading Board as compared with words presented in the ordinary way. At the same time it appears to be conducive to greater fluency of reading at a later stage, and thus to help towards a better



progress of backward readers. This impression has also been confirmed by our head mistress, Miss I. D. Hall. Future experience will have to show whether it is of value as a preparatory method of teaching to read in children of normal intelligence on the infants' school level. I have to add here that reading disabilities of the type of pure word-blindness, based as they are on a disorder of a prevailingly sensory nature, do not seem to respond to the method described.

I wish to thank Miss I. D. Hall and Mr. R. Ward for their valuable advice and assistance, and for their interest taken in the work with the Reading Board.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.91.385.523 Published online by Cambridge University Press