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## A Response to Jennings et al., and Cloer and Stanford

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The contributors to this session focused their professional talents on students with special problems—students considered/labeled “at risk” or “learning disabled”—and on specific concerns in affording them appropriate help in the schools. Both the Cloer and Stanford study and the study by Jennings et al. concentrated on secondary students. The presenters are to be commended on their shared concern for students with special needs.

Jennings et al., and Cloer, while concerned about the learning disabled and/or at risk student, concentrated their efforts in studies conducted with secondary students and teachers. The importance of limited visual and auditory perceptual skills or abilities as impairments in learning to read was recognized by Cloer who has constructed a simple screening test (“Screening Instrument for Learning Disabilities”) to assess such skills or abilities of students in a short period of testing. He expressed concern that these students with limited visual and auditory perceptual skills will have difficulty in learning to read English or in a foreign language (Spanish, French, Latin) class.

While regional in location, the study included a worthy number of students. Eight high schools, 18 teachers, 402 Spanish students, 354 French students, and 90 Latin students took part in the study. Cloer stated:

Of the 31 students who realized a total score on the test of 19 or lower, 16 actually made a semester grade in the D or F range (i.e., below 78). Of the other 15, 11 had five or more

points difference between the two parts of the test, implying that they may have either a visual or an auditory difficulty, but probably not both.

This finding points to the practical nature of the screening instrument.

While recognizing the potential value of this instrument as well as the time and effort of its author, a question came to mind about the auditory portion of the test. Students must read the test (of carefully prepared nonsense words) silently and make the necessary adjustments, relationships of indicated sounds. Could there be students taking the test who would be unable to read the nonsense words correctly, therefore could arrive at an incorrect vowel match? The test answer could be incorrect not because of faulty auditory perceptual skill but because of faulty interpretation of the visual cue. One opinion is that although this may not detract at all from the potential value of the test; it is a consideration.

A comparison of the students' first semester averages with their test scores pointed to the importance of the auditory-visual components in the courses. In attempting to look at teacher effect, the author noted that class test scores/semester grade scores correlations for some of the eighteen teachers in the study were much higher than for others. Knowing the principal methods, strategies, or emphasis of instruction from teacher to teacher could be illuminating as related to this finding. Perhaps some strategies in use in certain classes rely less on auditory-visual skills than do those strategies employed by other teachers.

The Jennings et al., paper concerned at risk students. Hayes (1986), at an earlier FORUM, stated that there are "... factors (which) are generally overlooked in mainstream reading theory and contribute greatly to an individual's chronic condition of being a 'remedial reader.' These factors are combinations of anxiety, attributions, maladaptive strategies, inaccurate or nonexistent concepts about aspects of reading, and goals and motivation." Rubenstein (1989) indicated that middle school students need to develop a feeling of self worth and success as people as well as students. In this vein, Jennings et al., have acknowledge a current educational problem of providing most effective programs for at risk high school students. Recognizing that traditionally remedial programs may not give appropriate consideration to affective aspects of a student's program or needs, the authors asked students and teachers to respond to certain open-ended questions as to what "at risk" meant to them, what are causes of this condition, and what could/should be done for and by at risk students to correct their situation. This study provided helpful first-hand information from teachers and students as to how they view the at risk problem and what programs should include.

In summary, each of the studies reported in this session has made a positive and practical contribution to the field of education. More has been learned about planning programs for the at risk student, for learning more about students with auditory-visual perceptual skills problems and some ideas about how to help identify them in foreign language classes. The major value of these papers, in my opinion, has come from the interest of the authors in viewing students as individuals with a need for programs geared to the student and in searching for ways to improve children's opportunities for success and learning in school—to be successful and to *feel* successful.

## References

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