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# USING READING JOURNALS TO IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION

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Current reading research is a strong stimulus for improving reading instruction. When procedures and techniques based on sound research are used in classroom or clinic, instruction improves. Basically, there are two types of research: (1) research emanating from colleges and universities and (2) action research launched at the school district level. University research is often conducted by professors and graduate students pursuing graduate degrees. Results of their research are often published in a professional journal.

Action research conducted by school personnel is often based on a specific question or problem that needs to be solved. The research design used by reading teachers and clinicians is often not as rigorous or as replicable as university-based research, but the premise on which the research is based is sound and frequently does result in an upgraded reading curriculum.

Both types of research have value. The problem is that while university-based research is often published in respected journals, it only occasionally reaches the classroom where it can make a difference. School-based research is usually reported in a newsletter distributed locally, rather than being disseminated widely. Obviously, there needs to be a better channel through which research flows. University professors must be aware of current school-based research which they can share with students in their undergraduate and graduate classes, and university based research must reach the practitioner working on a school district level.

The dissemination process needs to be improved. How can this be accomplished? Such journals as Early Years and Instructor serve a need for reading personnel and classroom teachers and one will find these two journals in the schools. Equally important are such journals as Reading World, Journal of Reading, Reading Teacher, Reading Research Quarterly, Reading Horizons, and Reading Psychology. Although college libraries subscribe to these journals, it

is rarer that these journals will be found in school libraries or teachers' rooms. This is unfortunate, because all these journals are instrumental in improving reading instruction.

The key issue here is to get these journals into the hands of principals and classroom teachers--many of whom are unfamiliar with them. The reading teacher, college instructor and reading clinician can utilize the following eight strategies to maximize the practical value of these journals.

1. College and school personnel can draw up a list of seven or eight of the reading journals that blend theory with practice and distribute this list to the schools with subscription blanks. A short review of an article in one of these journals can be published in the Superintendent's Bulletin. In my school district, a Reading Exposition is held each year. Sales representatives exhibit the latest reading/language arts materials for all school personnel to examine firsthand. This avoids the practice of ordering material only from the descriptions contained in catalogues. A space can be provided at this event to display reading journals of all types titled "Professional Development." This will give school personnel an opportunity to see the wealth and diversity of professional reading journals available to them.
2. If schools are not able to subscribe to all available journals, a list should be distributed systemwide to determine which journals are available at each school. Administrators, classroom teachers and reading personnel can then draw upon those journals to which their school does not subscribe. When ordering journals, it is very helpful for reading personnel and librarians to work together to see that as many different journals as possible are ordered within the school district.
3. A sample article from each journal can be distributed to school district personnel. It's a good idea to post an article selected by the reading teacher from one of these diverse journals each month in the teacher's lounge labeled "Article of the Month."
4. All the journals mentioned can be used equally and profitably by asking a teacher to select a journal and summarize one article for a discussion lead-in at a faculty meeting. This not only exposes teachers to the variety of journals but helps teachers keep abreast of the latest developments in the reading field. It can also be done by professors in college classes, with similar and valuable results.

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5. One staff meeting at the beginning of the year should be devoted to a display and discussion of reading journals in terms of their diversity and content. This discussion can be led by the reading teacher or librarian.

6. Another productive idea is to devote one entire staff meeting to reading professional reading journals. A wide array of journals are made available and staff members encouraged to select pertinent articles to read without interruptions. At a follow-up faculty meeting or staff development session, the ideas contained in these articles can be shared.

7. Reading teachers and classroom teachers can team up, select a few articles from such journals as Reading World, Reading Horizons, and Reading Research Quarterly and list the pertinent points discussed in these articles in chart form. These ideas can then be presented at a citywide in-service session titled "Current Reading Research" with an emphasis on the practical aspects in terms of classroom or clinical application.

8. A few years ago, our State Department of Education awarded \$1000 "mini-grants" on a competitive basis to reading personnel and classroom teachers. Grants were awarded for innovative reading programs and projects to be implemented in the schools, based on short proposals submitted. This type of activity is a viable way for college instructors and school personnel, utilizing research journals, to work together in formulating creative proposals resulting in class room change. Awards of this type have merit because they encourage the use of professional journals and research at the "grass roots" level.

#### Concluding Remarks

If reading instruction is to improve, ideas must flow freely between colleges and school districts. These ideas are contained in reading journals published by various organization and associations. Some journals are research-oriented and have particular appeal for college personnel while others are aimed at the practitioner. My contention is that their use should not be restricted to one group because all of them have ideas which can translate into improved instruction.