An Instrument for the Evaluation of Secondary Reading Programs

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OF SECONDARY READING PROGRAMS

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In recent years public interest in and concern over the effectiveness of secondary reading programs has grown steadily. According to recent findings by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Micklos, 1981) high school students have failed to measure a significant gain in total reading scores in the past ten years and have actually declined in the area of inferential comprehension. With the recent review of American education by a select bipartisan commission has come a renewed interest in quality reading programs for our schools.

During the 1982–83 academic year, a study (Cooter, 1983) sought to determine what the characteristics of a theoretically sound secondary reading program are, according to experts in the field, and to develop an instrument which may be used to begin an evaluation of existing secondary reading programs. This article will briefly discuss the procedure involved and present the Secondary Reading Program Inventory (SRPI).

Methods and Procedures

The first phase of the investigation was a review of books, journal articles, and doctoral dissertations pertaining to secondary reading. This process was completed in order to determine which characteristics had been previously identified as being important to the success of secondary programs in reading. Because of a lack of consistency and cohesion in the secondary reading literature, it was difficult for the researcher to develop a set of definitive characteristics for a theoretically sound program. However, eight categories were logically derived from the literature search which were either directly or indirectly the subject of extensive research. They were: goals, curriculum, materials, instructional strategies, evaluation, teacher competencies, physical facilities, and personnel. The categories were used as a starting point for the Delphi probe in the second part of the study.

Nine secondary reading experts were nominated by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, College of Education

faculty to serve on a panel whose purpse was to arrive at a consensus of opinion as to the essential characteristics of a theoretically sound secondary reading program. All identified persons were asked to participate in a three-round Delphi probe during the 1982-83 academic year. Each accepted this responsibility.

The Delphi procedure was selected because of its unique facility for establishing a consensus. In this process respondents were interrogated, and the initial series of responses were used to form subsequent questionnaires. The first probe was entirely open-ended with the panelists responding to eight categories identified as character-istics from the literature search. Responses were then collated and rank-ordered according to preference by the panel. In the second and third probes the respondents were asked to decide whether they were in low, moderate, or high agreement with the revised lists of characteristics. This phase of the study resulted in a list of some forty-four characteristics being identified by the panel as essential to the success of a theoretically sound secondary reading program.

The data collected from this phase of the study were then utilized in the construction of the Secondary Reading Program Inventory (SRPI), a checklist which may help in determining areas of congruence or discrepancy in existing secondary reading programs as compared to a theoretically sound program. It is intended to serve as an instrument which may help begin a more thorough evaluation of existing reading programs.

The SRPI was initially field-tested in Knox County, Tennessee, and was found to be useful at both building and system-wide levels in developing an initial status descrip-tion (Bellon & Handler, 1982) of existing secondary reading programs. The Secondary Reading Program Inventory (SRPI) is presented in Figure 1.

Concluding Statement

In most instances evaluation has a positive effect on the reading program (Rauch, 1970, p. 250). Of course, it is important that the evaluator consider the special needs and funds of the population being served in preparing any recommendations for change. It has long been held by educators that no one program is best for all learning situations. Likewise, the SRPI should be used judiciously and evaluators should be allowed to view the data with the particular needs of the school system in mind.

Figure 1

SECONDARY READING PROGRAM INVENTORY (SRPI)

The SRPI is an instrument designed to help Reading Consultants begin a status description (Bellon & Handler, 1982) of an existing secondary reading program. The characteristics for a theoretically sound program which comprise this list were determined in a Delphi probe (Cooter, 1983) of expert opinion and are listed from most important to least important in each section. The SRPI is not intended to take the place of a thorough evaluation of an existing secondary reading program, but simply to provide a valid means of beginning the process. Descriptions of each category are briefly discussed below.

1. Goals--This section is intended to help compare existing goals with those which may not have been included. If no written goals exist, this section will need to be temporarily omitted until direct study and observations can determine the intended goals of the program.
2. Curriculum--These program components were suggested by experts as being essential to a theoretically sound program in secondary reading.
3. Materials--This suggests the specific types of materials that should be available in any secondary reading program.
4. Instructional Strategies--These strategies are appropriate in both content classes and special reading classes.
5. Evaluation--This section pertains not only to the classroom, but also to the school and district level.
6. Teacher Competencies--These competencies apply to both content area and special reading teachers.
7. Physical facilities--Those listed should be available to all teachers.
8. Personnel--It will be necessary here to simply check whether or not these specific positions exist in the school. Specific qualities, skills, and abilities of each staff member will be examined more closely by the evaluator(s) during the course of the program evaluation.
9. Special Considerations--Many times secondary reading programs are modified to fit the special needs of the community it serves. This section is intended to help note special program components, or other considerations which may affect the reading program either positively or negatively.

Definitions

Environmental print - newspapers and other periodicals.

Holistic – relates to the integration of all learning modes, especially reading and writing skills.

IRI – Informal Reading Inventory

Literary genre – modern novels, classics, mysteries, etc.

Metacognitive strategies – comprised of two clusters of activities relating to (1) the knowledge that learners have about various aspects of the learning situation, and (2) the self-regulatory mechanisms used by active learners during an ongoing attempt to read (Brown, 1982, p. 28).

Trade books – library books

Directions

Check each characteristic on the SRPI which exists in the reading class, content-area classes, or is available in all classrooms. If the characteristic is not currently available , it should be duly noted. From this process, one should develop a list of program areas of Congruence and/or Discrepancies in section 10 and 11, respectively.

1. GOALS	Reading Class Only	Subject Area Only	School-wide	Not in Evidence
1) To develop the ability to read effectively for different purposes.	___	___	___	___
2) To help students understand content texts by providing for content-area reading in the regular classroom.	___	___	___	___
3) To foster recreational reading and help students appreciate and derive pleasure from reading.	___	___	___	___
4) To be able to use textbooks as a primary source of learning.	___	___	___	___
5) To adjust reading assignments to individual capabilities (individual instruction).	___	___	___	___

GOALS (cont'd)	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School -wide	Not in Evidence
6) To attain functional literacy as a minimum competency.	____	____	____	____
7) To provide an opportunity for developing basic reading skills during adolescence.	____	____	____	____
8) To provide remedial/ disabled readers appropriate reading instruction by a reading specialist.	____	____	____	____
9) To develop metacognitive strategies for processing discourse.	____	____	____	____

2. CURRICULUM

	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School -wide	Not in Evidence
1) The reading program develops comprehension skills (literal, interpretive, critical, creative).	____	____	____	____
2) The reading program develops reading/study skills.	____	____	____	____
3) Reading is taught as a tool, tied to the content of each subject course.	____	____	____	____
4) The reading program develops an appreciation and motivation to read for enjoyment.	____	____	____	____
5) A complete program provides remedial reading instruction for those students who need special help which cannot be provided in the regular content-area classroom.	____	____	____	____

3. MATERIALS	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School wide	Not in Evidence
1) A variety of trade books are available.	____	____	____	____
2) Environmental print (newspapers, etc.) are available for reading instruction and recreational reading purposes.	____	____	____	____
3) Reference sources are available.	____	____	____	____
4) A variety of literary genre are available for instructional and recreational purposes in both reading and content classes.	____	____	____	____
5) Content texts (at various reading levels) including supplemental readings for each course.	____	____	____	____
6) A variety of laboratory aids (programmed materials, skill practice materials, etc.) are available.	____	____	____	____
7) Published textbooks for teaching reading and study skills are available.	____	____	____	____

4. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School wide	Not in Evidence
1) Text study strategies are taught (SQ3R, outlining, mapping, etc.).	____	____	____	____
2) Reading strategies are integrated across the curriculum (including the Directed Reading Approach, vocabulary improvement exercises, organization skills, etc.).	____	____	____	____
3) Teachers prepare students for most learning experiences.	____	____	____	____

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES (con'd)

	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School wide	Not in Evidence
4) Teachers use a broad range of read/writing (Holistic) strategies.	____	____	____	____
5) Thinking skills (comprehension centered instructional strategies) are stressed.	____	____	____	____
6) Study guides are used in content classes.	____	____	____	____

5. EVALUATION

1) Informal testing/evaluation (essay answers, free response, unaided recall, teacher-made tests, IRI, observational techniques, etc.) are an integral evaluation component	____	____	____	____
2) Student assessment (reactions, discussion, student-devised tests, self-monitoring, etc.) is part of assessing the secondary reading program	____	____	____	____
3) The affective mode of learning is assessed through the use of such instruments as interest and attitude inventories.	____	____	____	____
4. Standardized tests (criterion and norm-referenced, group, etc.) are used to help assess the reading program.	____	____	____	____

6. TEACHER COMPETENCIES

1) Teachers are aware of content reading demands in their individual subject specialty(ies).	____	____	____	____

TEACHER COMPETENCIES (continued)	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School wide	Not in Evidence
2) Teachers are knowledgeable in techniques for teaching reading skills.	____	____	____	____
3) Teachers have a basic understanding of the reading skills appropriate for secondary learners.	____	____	____	____
4) Teachers are aware of the various materials available (including supplemental aids).	____	____	____	____
5) Teachers have a knowledge of diagnostic/testing procedures so as to help make instruction appropriate to the needs of the students.	____	____	____	____

7. PHYSICAL FACILITIES

1) A display area for books, magazines, etc.	____	____	____	____
2) An area for small group instruction.	____	____	____	____
3) An audio-visual area with a well stocked media center.	____	____	____	____
4) A reading lab for independent student work, which is coordinated with the content area classroom.	____	____	____	____

8. PERSONNEL

1) A reading consultant for grades 7-12 who can serve as a resource person for classroom teachers, is a reading/language specialist, and is qualified by demonstration.	____	____	____	____
2) Administrative leadership and support is evident (principals, coordinators, etc.).	____	____	____	____

PERSONNEL (Cont'd)	Read Class Only	Subj Area Only	School wide	Not in Evi- dence
3) Content-area teachers are considered to be integral and active parts of the reading staff.	___	___	___	___
4) Support staff is essential --librarian	___	___	___	___
--guidance staff	___	___	___	___
--school psychologist	___	___	___	___
--media specialist	___	___	___	___
--medical input	___	___	___	___

9. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS NOT MENTIONED ABOVE

10. AREAS OF CONGRUENCE (according to SRPI)

11. DISCREPANCIES (items marked "not in evidence")

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