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THE READING SPECIALIST AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

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Frequently, the remedial or developmental reading teacher at the secondary level functions as the content-area reading specialist. In this capacity the specialist works with content-area teachers, presenting reading ideas, solving reading problems, and involving content-area teachers in the change model. However, before any interaction occurs between the specialist and the content-area teacher, the reading specialist must attain these two objectives:

1. Be invited into the classroom by the teacher rather than enter with a mandate from the principal; and
2. Work successfully with the teacher to perform the job properly and to achieve professional goals.

Achieving such goals is complicated by personal idiosyncracies and individual work situations. For example, many teachers feel threatened and become defensive (Cross, 1978) when another professional, especially another teacher or administrator, visits the classroom to observe and advise. Further, many teachers experience difficulty as they attempt to change their concepts and methods of teaching; they desire to maintain the status quo because they feel comfortable with it (Herber, 1970). The reading specialist and/or the administrator—responsive to the concerns of content-area teachers—can alleviate, possibly eliminate, negative teacher reactions and, concomitantly, attain the desired goals by effecting three basic steps in the change model (Solomon, 1977). Through these steps, the reading specialist can bring innovative reading methods to the teaching of specific content.

THE CHANGE MODEL

1. Unfreeze specific concepts held by teachers in the building.
Such concepts may concern methods of teaching, content matter, or factors that affect good teaching. Unfreezing these concepts is best done by a convincing demonstration of the need for change. Example: Conduct an experiment with a teacher where key vocabulary words are pretaught an experimental group, and not pretaught a control group before a reading assignment. Many study show that the group that covered the vocabulary words before reading will comprehend the material better. Such an effective demonstration

will help create a readiness for change in the teacher.

2. Change the concept. Demonstrate sound educational practices that would work better than would the teacher's original concept. Example: Introduce the Directed Reading Activity (DRA) that, in the first step, reviews important and unfamiliar vocabulary before the actual reading. Thus, the teacher may be induced to incorporate the other DRA steps into the teaching or content. The Structured Overview could also be introduced at this point.

3. Refreeze the concept. The concept is reinforced because it is efficient and practical and produces significantly better short and long-term results for both teacher and learner. Example: The students tell the teacher that they understood the chapter content because of their pre-reading review of vocabulary. The teacher feels good about overcoming a learning barrier and is pleased with the comprehension scores.

CONCERNS

Most reading authorities agree that the overall goal of the content-area specialist is to instruct teachers about reading and, in turn, have them teach their students how to read in the particular disciplines, encouraging them to do so regularly (Herber 1970, Robinson 1975, Estes and Vaughan 1978, Vacca 1981). Some teachers possess conscious knowledge of the reading process. It is the reading specialist's responsibility to create awareness in teachers of the language processing that they themselves use and to convey to teachers an understanding of their students' abilities and needs so that the students can process the language of the content areas.

Because many teachers are concerned with covering content, it is often difficult to persuade them of the existence of numerous aspects of content-field language that teachers are best qualified to teach (Cramer 1978). Yet, if they can teach reading processes and cover content concurrently, the effort will probably result in improved reading comprehension and overall learning for students. However, the need for such simultaneous effort appears to be extra effort, and is frequently a difficult concept to "sell" to many teachers. They resent the idea that 'every teacher is a teacher of reading.' Using the Change Model, though, the reading specialist can enable most teachers to see the necessity of teaching reading and content at the same time.

UNFREEZE

To work with teachers, the reading specialist must be invited into the classroom. The specialist can accomplish this by doing casual front work, or advance preparation, including the following:

1. Indication of a personal interest in, or reading about the content area;
2. Indication of innovative ways to practice a content-area skill, using specific examples;
3. Offers to team teach; and
4. Demonstration of interest in specific textbooks and/or parts of the curriculum.

By initiating conversations about reading, the specialist provides teachers with time to discern reading problems in their students and perhaps to reflect on reading and study skills techniques the teachers, themselves, use. Oftentimes, this teacher self-analysis creates an excellent climate for change. Consequently, teachers might unfreeze several concepts or attitudes preparatory to working with the reading specialist, and begin to accept the idea of the specialist's presence in the classroom.

The risk of making teachers feel threatened can be avoided if the specialist determines that teachers are ready to work with the specialist. After this has been determined, an initial visit may be arranged. During this time, the specialist may show in behavior the willingness and warmth that promote good feelings and generate an atmosphere of cooperation. Make encouraging gestures—a nod of the head, periodic eye contact, an occasional smile—that indicate attention and approval and that put the teacher more at ease. Even though there might be ideas or methods with which the specialist doesn't agree, there must be an attitude of approval in the environment of this initial visit.

As the specialist leaves the room s/he should talk briefly with the teacher, providing positive comments about certain aspects of the reading such as the material or a technique. Above all, the specialist must avoid intimidating the teacher by assuming the role of critic or evaluator. As Cross (1978, p. 441) says:

Our ego resides in those characteristics we really value about ourselves. For instance, you might describe your working self by some of the following adjectives: creative, reliable, tolerant, responsible, innovative and undoubtedly many others. Now, to strike a defensive reaction in you all that has to be done is to challenge at least one of these valued qualities.

And, after all, teaching is a field in which one's ego lies not far from the actual performance. Therefore, criticism in any form can be taken personally.

CHANGE

Following observation in the content classroom, the reading specialist should have some guidelines for working with the teacher. The teacher may need assistance with problems or seek advice on reading methods. Thus, it is important to have a teacher-specialist planning session before actual work in the classroom begins.

After identification of a reading problem or area of concern, the content-area specialist must find reading strategies that might work and that might be used by the classroom teacher. After these strategies have been carefully thought out, it is essential that they be presented attractively and that the rationale or theory behind the concept be provided in the planning session so that the general idea is adaptable to other specific material. It is essential, also, that strategies and methods be presented honestly. For example, if a readability formula is used, its lack of complete reliability and other drawbacks should be pointed out.

During this planning time, the specialist must make an effort to have ideas and suggestions well-received and to demonstrate techniques in the content-area teacher's classroom to help bring about change. After the specialist leaves, the teacher must teach the lesson and the reading strategy to the students without the specialist's help. The effectiveness of the reading specialist can be gauged by the degree of independent implementation of reading skills which the content area teacher retains after working together on a particular skill.

COMMUNICATE

For the reading specialist, communication skills are extremely important for effectuating the Change Model. Careful listening is essential to realize exactly what concerns the teacher has and to perceive when help is sought. Often, casual but subtle comments are pleas for assistance (St. John 1978). Because the specialist's job takes one through the full range of academic subjects and because s/he does not usually possess the subject mastery of the teachers, the specialist must listen carefully.

Two skills that will help the specialist communicate better with other teachers include: 1) paraphrasing, and 2) feedback (Cross 1978, St. John 1978). Paraphrase to clarify ideas. The specialist may ask, "Are you saying...?" and repeat an idea so that the specialist and the content area teacher both understand an idea clearly and accurately. To make a point or to emphasize an issue, the specialist should feed back reactions and reasons for them to the other person. Colleagues respect honestly stated feelings that have supporting rationale (Cross 1978). Use of paraphrasing and feedback strengthens the specialist's knowledge of the content-area teacher's objectives and also serves to openly convey the specialist's ideas and concerns to the teacher.

Working with a small group of teachers or with a department is more difficult than is working with individuals. MacKenzie (1979) offers seventeen ideas to make group work productive and to lessen tension. Vacca & Vacca (1980) suggest several methods to unfreeze teachers who resist change. The specialist, implementing these ideas or similar ones, will handle better the broad spectrum of teacher attitudes ranging from advocacy to dissension. The specialist, as s/he works with group members, will perceive that time is more profitably spent with teachers willing to try what the specialist proposes. Still, the content-area specialist must be patient with those who are critical because some teachers do not accept nor understand new ideas immediately (Usova 1978).

REFREEZE

Change occurs as the specialist works effectively and convincingly with the teacher in the planning sessions prior to the actual classroom work. Refreezing is accomplished when the strategies for reading and the methods for teaching them work well for the particular teacher. In other words, the marriage of content and reading skills will lead to a more effective product/process ratio, and the teacher feels that the students are saving time as they comprehend more of what they read. Throughout the inter-

facings between the specialist and the content-area teacher, and between teacher and students, a good feeling tone should prevail (Hunter 1975).

SUPPORT

Reading authorities concur that the administrator is the key to an effective content-area reading program. Therefore, the administrator can assist or impede the specialist's efforts to instruct teachers in the application of reading strategies. A supportive administrator can further the implementation of the Change Model. However, even though an administrator supports the efforts of a reading specialist, the specialist probably will do well to 'lobby' with the administrator in order to gain not only his/her support but also his/her active cooperation in the content-area reading program. A recent study (Moore 1980) indicates that content-area teachers perceive the need for the principal to be actively involved in staff development.

CONCLUSION

The reading specialist who accepts the challenge of change in his/her school needs a perspective and a generous time frame to attain long-term change goals. However, through positive contact with classroom teachers, through effective communication skills, with the active support of administrators, and through application of the Change Model, the specialist can strengthen his/her duties of teaching students to read more effectively and efficiently in school.

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