



# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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Volume 22  
Issue 3 April 1982

Article 2

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4-1-1982

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### Recommended Citation

Warren Meeks, J. (1982). Title I and Reading Achievement: Some Perspectives as the Hatchet Descends. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 22 (3). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol22/iss3/2](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol22/iss3/2)

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# TITLE I AND READING ACHIEVEMENT: SOME PERSPECTIVES AS THE HATCHET DESCENDS

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In 1965 Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as ESEA. Title I of this act provided financial assistance to local school districts for the planning and operation of special programs for the educationally deprived child. ESEA was designed as a supplemental program to upgrade the educational opportunities of children from low income areas, but not to supplant the educational programs than in progress. The goal of Title I was to eradicate children's educational inequities that were due to economic and social deprivation. It is clear that economic poverty was the primary focus. This is plainly stated in the 1977 report on compensatory education from the National Institute of Education:

In recognition of the special educational needs of children of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families in order to expand and improve their educational programs by various means.

(NIE, 1977, p. 8)

The enactment of ESEA was unique in that this was the first federally funded compensatory education bill. There were many hurdles that had to be overcome before the bill was passed. Other administrations had tried to pass similar measures but had failed. There was the traditional argument between church and state (public vs. private schools). This problem was solved by stating that while private schools were not to receive direct financial assistance, the children attending private schools, who fell within the guidelines as being qualified to receive Title I funds, were entitled to receive those benefits through the public schools or Local Educational Agency.

The long-standing feud between rural and urban states was handled by making funds available to all areas, basing that primarily on family income status. In this way, all eligible areas would be able to get their share of funds. The problem of federal control of education was handled by giving the administration of appropriate funds directly to state educational agencies. These agencies were individually responsible to the federal government for making sure that the money would be spent within the guidelines set forth.

Title I is the largest federal program providing funds to elementary and secondary education with nearly five million children

in over 14,000 school districts participating in Title I classes during the 1978-79 school year. That equals 90% of the nation's school districts in the program, at a cost of more than two billion dollars during that period.

According to the 1980 Annual Report of the Department of Education, one of the major accomplishments in fiscal year 1980 was an improvement in student achievement scores in major cities such as Detroit, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. (US DOE, 1980). The report did specify, however, that there is no definite evidence that the increases are due to Title I, but the authors felt that Title I compensatory classes played an important role.

At the present time, Title I will extend through September 10, 1983. However, cuts have been made, through reduction of funds and consequently, services and staff.

#### Pros and Cons

In a recent edition of The Virginian-Pilot (Mar.13, 1981), there was a report on the expected cut of school employees in Portsmouth, Virginia, due to the lack of federal funds in the remedial reading and mathematics programs. The article stated:

"...the program has been controversial because its effectiveness is difficult to prove."

This statement sums up a major problem of Title I. There appears to be a lack of information concerning the effectiveness of Title I classes. Much of the information that is available relates to the attitudes of parents and teachers, rather than to statistical evidence concerned with the effectiveness of the program. Hecht (1973) stated that not only was there a lack of standardized procedures for evaluating the programs, but there was no standard way to disseminate any information that was gathered.

Research related to the population served by Title I also points out that this program is not serving all of the children eligible to receive help. According to Pennsylvania State Senator Jeannette Reibman (1978), there are two reasons for this. First, there is just not enough money available to serve all of the eligible children. Second, since each LEA sets up its own criteria for choosing Title I schools, all of the schools chosen are not necessarily meeting the same standards.

William Wayson (1975) expressed some of the strongest opposition to Title I. He felt that it was a disaster right from the beginning. He stated that schools and communities were not ready to accept the concept of Title I nor were they prepared to accept the additional personnel and the funds they brought with them, since these funds were only available to those children designated as Title I students. He also felt that much of the money intended for the remedial classes was siphoned off into pet projects or was just lost due to poor administration of the program.

Some educators feel that the testing done in the Title I program is not realistic (Long, 1977). Currently, most of the testing is done at the grade level in which the child is enrolled, rather than at the instructional level of reading or mathematics where the child

is functioning. It was found that grade-level and instructional-level testing did result in significantly different grade-equivalent scores. In recent years, less than qualified personnel were hired to teach in the program. They were not reading specialists with graduate work in reading, rather, as one principal stated, "My Title I teacher is a former classroom teacher who couldn't handle the discipline of a large group."

While all of these negative comments have validity, some things have been done to correct the inadequacies of the program. In 1974, when ESEA was extended for five more years, mandates were prescribed for the evaluation of the program. Standards were set to be used in evaluating academic performance of the children involved, and standards were also set to insure that Title I funds were being used appropriately (Halperin, 1978). The statistic designed to measure student achievement is known as the normal curve equivalent or the NCE. It is recognized that any positive NCE over 0 is directly attributable to Title I. Zero (0) means that no learning has occurred as a result of the Title I programs, an increase of three to four is considered average and a gain of over seven is considered outstanding.

There is some concrete information about Title I that we should cite. Children from poorer families are proportionately more highly represented in Title I reading classes than in the general school population. Since Title I was created to serve the economically depressed child, it is therefore fulfilling that commitment.

Proponents of Title I feel that the affective benefits of the program have been overlooked by its detractors. Many of these affective elements are hard to measure, but there has been research carried out in this area. Waller (1977) measured the attitudes of children enrolled in compensatory reading classes and compared these attitudes against children who were not in compensatory reading classes. While he did not specify these compensatory classes as Title I, the program would definitely fall into this category. In almost all instances, research reported that children enrolled in compensatory reading classes had a better attitude toward reading than those children not enrolled in these classes. This affective gain prevailed even when there was no significant gain in reading achievement.

Another positive result of the Title I ESEA programs has been called the "spin-off effect." School personnel have reported evidence that regular school programs have benefited due to the remedial practices of the Title I classes because many specialized methodologies have been implemented in the regular classroom as preventive measures.

Some educators also feel that due to the impact of the Title I programs, compensatory education has become accepted as a valid educational practice. Before the passage of ESEA, only one state had mandated compensatory classes, but by 1977, at least sixteen other states had implemented compensatory education. Most proponents of Title I do feel, however, that there is a great need for more specific guidelines to be used in evaluation procedures plus more specific guidelines to help the LEA reach an even greater number of children.

Statistical evidence of the success or failure of Title I programs is difficult to find, but there have been some published reports relating success stories due to Title I. Davidoff (1974) reported on the progress of Title I children in the Philadelphia city schools by examining scores of students with serious reading problems who were enrolled in compensatory classes and other children who, for one reason or another, were not in compensatory classes even though they were reading below grade level. The students in the Title I classes made substantial gains in reading achievement scores, whereas nonparticipating students did not. The results that he reported stated that the negative rates of performance experienced before Title I had been halted and positive rates of performances were being reported. Children in Title I schools were making a 75% gain in reading when compared to the same schools before Title I.

Similar results were reported to the Ninety-Sixth Congress (Oversight Hearing on Title I, 1979). The Iowa State Title I director reported that Title I classes were definitely proving their worth. These reading classes showed a NCE gain of 6.3 for the 1977-78 school year. The results of reading tests presented by the Director of Compensatory Education in the state of Tennessee showed similar results. The state had an average NCE gain of 4.2 in reading.

A success story was told from Ohio for 1978. Participants in Title I compensatory reading classes gained an average of 12 NCE's for that year. Ohio reported that the highest priority for Title I services in the state was to provide supplemental reading instruction.

### Conclusion

Title I seems to have suffered from a politically bad public image. This could be due in part, to unrealistic goals expected from the program. Many expected the gap between Title I students and the average or above-average students to decrease. This is not a realistic expectation in that while the Title I child is receiving extra help, the above-average or average child is not standing still. In reality, services provided by the Title I teacher allow the regular classroom teacher to have more time to spend with the other students. In consequence, the gap isn't necessarily decreasing, but all levels of ability are being increased. As long as those children designated as Title I children are demonstrating achievement due to compensatory Title I classes, this program should remain a viable supplemental education program.

The future of Title I is uncertain, as is the future of the children who are being helped to read by the program. Hindsight is better than foresight in terms of what could have been possible to avert the problem and to demonstrate positive effects. However, what the field of reading has gleaned from two decades of Title I will help us to continue to design programs whose worth can be measured and the effects seen.

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