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Donald C. Cushenbery
University of Nebraska, Omaha

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THE NEW ROLE OF ALL TEACHERS FOR IMPROVING READING SKILLS (HOW TO SURVIVE WITH LESS TITLE I READING MONEY)

Donald C. Cushenbery, Ed.D.
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This particular act was designed to provide money to schools for undertaking new educational programs which would be of help to various kinds of students. Title I of the act was designed to help schools provide reading programs for disadvantaged students and other students who lived in socio-economic environments deemed substandard. The money was allocated to the various states for distribution to local school districts. Local school officials were encouraged to use new and different approaches to reading instruction for those children who found that reading was a difficult process to integrate into their learning patterns.

All of the monies provided for Title I were expected to be devoted to projects that were beyond the regular instructional program of the district for the designated students. School officials who received the money were expected to complete an annual report relating to the effectiveness of the projects that had been funded by Title I money. Certain specific reading achievement tests were chosen as evaluation instruments which should be used with students in the programs.

From 1965 to the present time, millions of dollars have been allocated by Congress for Title I reading programs across the nation. For the most part these programs have been successful in improving the reading skills of the targeted student groups. Some persons, within and outside of the Federal government, have felt that much of the money should have gone to other projects in other agencies.

The financing of public elementary and high school education became an issue in the presidential election of 1980. Candidate Ronald Reagan was asked—"What are the major problems facing elementary education today?" His reply was "Since 1962 when federal aid to education began, per student costs have increased and test scores have fallen virtually in proportion to the rise of federal spending and control over education. The Carter administration policy has been more of the same and I disagree with it." Candidate Reagan was also asked the question—"Do you plan to do anything to alleviate the problem?" His answer was "The best way to insure quality education is to maximize control by parents, teachers, and local school boards. To accomplish this we should transfer federal educational funding of programs back to the state and local school district along with the resources to pay for them." He went on to say that he wanted to abolish the \$15 billion Department of Education as

State Department of Education, and said that "there is pretty good evidence that students who participated in the Title I program made more progress in reading and math than they would have without special instruction." (3)

In summary, it would appear that those disadvantaged students who have been involved in a viable, well-planned reading program have been able to achieve very positive results. These students have been exposed to new material, special instruction, and other types of techniques that would lead them to gain at an optimum rate. As funds are trimmed, all teachers in a school system must assume new roles.

The New Role of Teachers

As we proceed in this decade, we will have to formulate a new role for all teachers if schools are to survive with less Title I reading money. The facts are that many kinds of children are enrolled in schools, some have reading difficulties, and individual teachers must assume the instruction for helping each learner. There are at least five new strategies that must be undertaken if the instruction for these pupils is to be thorough, in helping to meet the learning needs of each child. The following thoughts are not listed in any particular order of importance.

1. With fewer reading specialists available, each classroom teacher will need to develop expertise in diagnosis and correction of reading problems. For some this will necessitate enrollment in local universities, in graduate reading classes. For others it might involve enrolling in a workshop, while for others it may require the review of certain professional texts in the field. Many companies send brochures to teachers describing new literature in the area of reading. Other companies advertise in reading journals to apprise readers of new materials that are currently being tested and used.

2. Schools must provide teachers with a wide assortment of materials which are housed in a central location in the building. If the reading specialist can no longer be employed, materials which he or she formerly used might be made available to the total staff. In some cases this has not been possible under previous Title I guidelines, but with the relaxation of such guidelines this practice may be possible in the future.

3. Better accounting procedures must be developed for recording the reading strengths and limitations of each student. More than ever before, the classroom teacher will need to have a very careful and exact assessment of the efficiency of each student in the basic skill areas of word attack, comprehension, and study methods. This would necessitate the listing of the skills emphasized at particular grade levels. The students' names could be listed at the left side of a profile sheet, and checkmarks could be recorded which would indicate whether the child has accomplished the skill at any given point in time.

4. As finances permit, more utilization of computer-assisted instruction will need to be instituted. For example, such equipment as the Apple and the TRS-80 computers might be used for this purpose. These computer terminals allow each child to proceed at his or her own rate based on the exact instructional needs of the student.

As the computers are sold on a wider basis, the price of such teaching aids no doubt will be lower in the future.

5. The use of both paid and volunteer aides must be enlarged. If classroom teachers are to assume a greater role for remediation, they must receive additional help. These aides can give individual instruction to students who are greatly deficient in one or more of the strategic reading skill areas.

The Future of Title I Reading Programs

It appears to be a fact of life that schools in the future will be receiving less Title I money for reading and related programs than they have in the past. This should not signal the end of effective reading programs for students, since many of these learners need immediate help from the remainder of the teaching staff.

The programs must be streamlined and altered according to the five guidelines which have been expressed in the previous section. Certainly all classroom teachers need to see reading as a process rather than a subject. Each instructor must assume the posture that he or she is totally responsible for the teaching of word attack, vocabulary, comprehension, and study skills, as these components relate to the subject or learning level involved.

Reading achievement testing results need not necessarily decline as a result of decreased Title I funding. With some restructuring of priorities and attitudes on the part of both teachers and administrators, we can continue the types of outstanding reading programs that have been established over the past sixteen years. Can we survive with less Title I reading money? It is possible by reassessing our responsibilities.

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