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Editorial Comment

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

A new administration in Washington will doubtless bring many changes into our lives, changes which may be good or ill depending on our point of view. HORIZONS wishes to add to the potential for good by offering some advice to the leadership of the land. This journal has been in the position of gathering and winnowing educational strategies through the administrations of six presidents, and feels it is qualified to give advice.

First, our national leaders should follow the methods of reading specialists in accurate assessment of needs, of measuring strengths and weaknesses. In reading, we start working with students at all levels from their strengths, for the purpose of restoring some self-confidence. On the national level, we often see the assessment results becoming politicized, and the weaknesses being emphasized out of all proper proportions. Our advice in this regard is simple: stress the strengths before attempting to eliminate the weaknesses.

The aspect of self-confidence is as important in the national body as it is in a remedial reading student. We cannot base realistic and attainable goals on anything less than initial success when we work with disabled readers—our newly elected officials should see how teachers accomplish the building of success into the earliest efforts. Students or citizens, people must *believe they can* before they will put forth the energy. Americans should be told right now, and every day, that they are energetic, cooperative, cheerful, and generous. Specialists in reading know the sadness of seeing students who have been convinced by adults they are “no good.”

In working with reading students, teachers have to maintain a positive attitude, showing each student every step of progress, however small, in a graphic way, to enhance incentive. National spokespersons should recognize the necessity of this approach. They should show plainly they believe in the public, in the willingness of the people to work toward goals. A reading teacher cannot afford to let the word “failure” creep into the vocabulary— not reaching a goal is only a matter of delay. If this approach can be applied on a national basis, productivity will rise.

Teachers who devote themselves to the field of reading improvement have another ingredient we wish our national leaders could be given—the willingness to persevere, without adulation or gratitude from those they teach. If educators in reading did not have monumental patience, they would fail. The new administration needs to recognize the importance of patience, and avoid the temptation to project blame.

Last, and most important, cabinet members should observe that reading teachers cannot make false promises to students, or misinform their charges about their situation. It is well known that such actions damage students’ chances for the future. Political leaders too, should

realize that using ambiguous and equivocal language to hide the truth is damaging to the whole future of America. Honesty is vital.

The people of the nation are concerned about the future, like students coming to class on the first day of a new school year. Just as students look for encouragement, instruction, and guidance; adult citizens look to the new administration for confident leadership and straightforward accounts of the actions taken. Just as teachers of reading have to be unabashed peddlers of enthusiasm, our elected leaders have to be examples of competence without guile.

The new administration has a much longer period of time than reading teachers are given to make improvements evident; we can only hope helmsmen will set their course by the constellations of good teachers in our American schools.

Ken VanderMeulen

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