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PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE SECONDARY READING PROGRAMS

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Due to the fact that over 30 states have now mandated competency tests for high school students, there is much general interest across the land with respect to the establishment and maintenance of programs which will help students improve basic reading skills. Understandably, these programs have, and are, taking many forms depending on school finances, leadership, and available time. Unfortunately, in many of these programs there is some evidence that reading is treated as a subject and special reading teachers are hired to teach the students who are considered to be "sick" readers. Frequently, all of the formal reading program activities take place in a single room and content teachers take little responsibility for reading instruction as such since they contend that such teaching is being assumed by the special reading teacher.

The purpose of this article is to make recommendations regarding the manner in which an effective, viable reading curriculum should be established. The items are not listed in any particular priority.

1. *There should be evidence that all content teachers are teaching the reading skills which are unique to their particular areas.* Reading is not a subject such as mathematics or science and cannot be taught apart from content subjects. Reading is a body of skills and every secondary teacher must see himself or herself as a reading teacher. Particularly unique to any content area is the vocabulary which deals with that subject. For example, such words as "chlorophyll," "photosynthesis," and "hydrogen" should be taught by the science teacher as part of the regular class session. The skill of understanding and applying sequence of events should be properly promoted by the social studies and science teachers. Critical reading skills such as the identification of propaganda techniques should probably be stressed in both of the areas of language arts and social studies.

Reading skills cannot and should not be taught in isolation. Competencies in all segments of reading should be the responsibility of all teachers who use printed matter as a tool of instruction. A reading specialist should be available to help with those students who have severe learning problems and cannot profit from the usual classroom instruction.

2. *Meaningful in-service should be provided for all faculty members to upgrade their reading instructional skills.* Since all faculty members

have varying levels of ability with respect to teaching reading skills, a careful analysis should be undertaken to determine which teachers need help in such areas as vocabulary, word analysis, comprehension, and study skills instruction. A list of basic competencies could be formulated and each teacher should be helped to determine his or her individual strengths. Modules could be developed in each of the areas for use with groups of instructors who desire aid in a particular area. Any and all in-service should be based on the individual and collective needs of faculty members. Total group instruction with lecture formats should not be emphasized since the instructional needs of teachers tend to vary considerably. A continuous plan of evaluation of the sessions should be in evidence at all times.

3. *The secondary reading program which is established should be a logical part of a K-12 skills and competencies sequence that is applicable for the total school district. Reading instruction should not stop at grade four or grade six.* Students need help with the important developmental skills of such aspects as content clues, use of advanced level dictionaries, interpretative comprehension levels, and specialized study skills. The contents of a well devised school-wide reading curriculum should reflect which competencies should be accomplished at the various learning and grade levels from K-12. All secondary teachers should be very conversant with the elementary skills sequence and develop an understanding with respect to how they can plan their lessons to help students gain competency in desired skilled areas at the secondary levels. Some of these skills are unique to certain subject areas whereas others are common to all subjects.
4. *All secondary reading programs should make instructional provisions for meeting the needs of students with widely varying reading abilities.* A survey of reading achievement test results of any large group of secondary students indicates that the instructional reading levels of students may range from as low as grade four to as high as the university graduate level. Because of this condition, no one textbook or common mode of instruction will be useful or practical for all students. Secondary teachers must make provision for these students by using multi-level textbooks; providing modified study guidebooks; making various reading and writing assignments; and establishing ability track classes for students with very low or very high reading ability levels. A special reading laboratory or clinic should be established for use by those students who are especially deficient in basic reading skill areas. Honors classes and opportunities for enrollment in university classes should be made available for those students who are gifted with regard to reading skill development.
5. *The costs of the program should be reasonable and defensible for the number of students who are served.* A careful cost analysis should be made of the type of reading laboratory which should be constructed for the students who need help in reading skills. Since students learn best through the use of techniques and materials representing many learn-

ing modalities, there should be a direct effort made to provide for a wide variety of materials of both software and hardware types. Emphasis should be given to those aids which are nonconsumable and can be used with many different types of students. High cost hardware items which have very limited instructional objectives should receive intensive evaluation. Attention should be given to the low cost development of reading skills boxes which may be constructed from workbook skill sheets that have been laminated. In all cases the materials and teaching tools should correlate with the exact skill needs of the students who will use the laboratory or clinic.

6. *A well constructed reading program should receive both periodic as well as continuous evaluation to determine if the total offerings are producing desired results in terms of student reading achievement.* Assuming that a list of short-term and long-term objectives is built for the reading program, a series of informal and formal devices should be utilized to evaluate such aspects as reading competencies of students, attitudes of learners, and teacher perceptions of the program. At the beginning of the school year an attitude inventory could be administered to both students and teachers regarding what they expect from an effective reading program. At the close of the school year a follow-up instrument could be administered to determine if progress has been made with respect to positive changes in attitudes. Pre and post reading achievement testing using the *Nelson-Denny* or some similar test could lend data with respect to skill development of students. For preciseness in the evaluative process, an evaluative device should be listed for each program objective.
7. *There should be ample evidence that there has been some type of community involvement in the construction, implementation, and evaluation of the reading program.* Because the graduates of the school system become working members of the local community, the involvement of community leaders in the development and evaluation of reading program objectives would seem to be both natural and practical. For example, the mandating of competency tests by local and state boards of education is a procedure whereby community leaders indicate to both students and teachers what reading and language skills they think are important and necessary. Parents of students should be asked to help to develop objectives in order to insure a close cooperation of both the home and school in moving to common goals. There is sufficient evidence to support the principle that there will be much more support and less criticism of the secondary reading program if there is a common understanding among all parties regarding the total reading curriculum.

Summary

The establishment of an effective secondary reading program which serves the needs of students is based on at least seven basic principles which are described in this article. All programs should give evidence that (a)

reading is treated as a body of skills, not a subject; (b) meaningful individualized in-service is provided for teachers; (c) reading instruction is perceived as a K-12 curriculum; (d) the instruction is prescribed for individual students based on their instructional needs; (e) the costs of the program are logical and defensible; (f) there is continuous program evaluation; and (g) community involvement is a part of the development of the program.

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