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READING PROGRAMS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL A CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATION

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Reading is a fundamental skill necessary for success in school. (It is also important for preparation for college and for vocation). Every job whether in the home, school, office, factory or farm requires some type of reading. For an effective participation in a democratic society reading is all the more important for every citizen. Of course, even for pleasure and entertainment reading has certain unique advantages over other media because the reader is free from outside control or pressure, in terms of choosing his material, time and place to read. In short, competence in reading is essential for success and satisfaction in academic, social, political, vocational, and personal life of the modern man.

Reading is, however, a complex process which involves a large number of skills. Burkart (2) in her study mentioned 214 reading skills. Although there is no agreement on the number of skills the fact is that all the skills cannot be taught in the primary grades. There are many skills which are taught in the intermediate grades and several which are extended and reinforced at the junior and senior high school levels. Reading is thus a continuous process which permeates all grades in the school and goes beyond it.

At the secondary level content reading takes most of the class time. Students have to learn the specialized vocabulary and concepts of each subject-matter area. They have to learn study skills and flexibility of reading rate. Content area teachers can provide an effective program if they share the responsibility of teaching reading skills in their respective fields.

Many teachers suggest that if a sound basal program is provided in the classroom children will learn to transfer reading skills to the content areas on their own. Such a transfer, however, does not take place automatically. Students have to be taught how they can apply their skills to other subjects. Another important fact is that although there are some skills common to all areas each area also requires some specific reading skills. Content area teachers have, therefore, a special role in the teaching of reading.

Another factor which necessitates the teaching of reading at the secondary level is the use of a single textbook for all students in the

classroom. There is a wide range of reading ability in any classroom. Expecting every student to finish the same textbook in about the same time and be able to perform at the same level with others is against the principles of educational psychology. Moreover, textbooks used in the high school are generally difficult for a large number of students. Beldon and Lee (1) examined the readability level of five science textbooks for secondary schools and discovered that one-third to one-half of the students expected to use them found them difficult. Until suitable textbooks are produced and made available it is imperative that teachers develop necessary skills in students to get the most out of their assigned books.

Lack of reading ability in teenagers is responsible for high rate of dropouts as established by Penty (5). Reading failure may also lead to delinquent behavior. In most cases young adults have the potential and with a proper program of instruction can improve their ability.

What kinds of reading programs can a secondary school offer to meet the needs and abilities of its students? The literature identifies the following four programs:

1. *Developmental Reading Program*: In this program reading instruction is carried out in a sequential manner in all grades.
2. *Corrective Reading Program*: In this program students who have minor difficulties in reading are grouped together for special help within the framework of regular classroom instruction.
3. *Remedial Reading Program*: In this program students who have serious difficulties in reading and are reading below their capacity are taught, generally outside the classroom and on individual basis using diagnostic and remediation techniques.
4. *Reading Improvement for the College-Bound*: In this program special instructions are provided in vocabulary growth, comprehension, critical reading, study skills, and rate of reading for students who show academic promise.

Because of the pressure of accountability schools are asking how they can assess their reading programs in order to determine the changes necessary for improvement. One most comprehensive and frequently used instrument for secondary school evaluation is the *Evaluative Criteria* (3). However, it contains only a few questions on reading programs and does not really provide a complete evaluation in this area.

One weakness of the *Evaluative Criteria* as well as of the proposed checklist is the subjective nature of some questions. It is difficult to lay down exactly what is meant by "adequate" or "satisfactory." It is hoped that the evaluator would use his judgment in answering the checklist. However, the questions have been so designed that the answer expected in each case is either "yes" or "no." Another feature of the checklist is its conciseness. Teachers, consultants, and principals generally prefer simple and quick instruments which do not take too much of their time. The proposed checklist is quite concise and quick.

One important area which the evaluator must keep in mind is the school philosophy and the needs of the community it is supposed to serve. As

pointed out by the *Junior High School/Middle School Evaluative Criteria* (4), "the philosophy and objectives of a school should determine the nature of its program." It is important to know the composition of the community, occupational and educational status of the people, the economic climate, and vocational interests and aspirations of the community. Some communities may be more interested in supporting a vocational and technical program than an academic program. They may not favor a program meant for the college-bound.

Similarly, the philosophy and objectives of a school will influence the kinds of programs it offers. The staff of a certain school may believe that reading instruction stops at grade 6 or that teaching reading is the responsibility of the English teachers only, or that only remedial reading should be taught in secondary school in special classes by special teachers. On the other hand a school may specify one of its objectives as helping each student read at his capacity level or teaching him to vary his reading speed according to his purpose of reading and the nature of the material to be read. In other words, some schools may believe that reading is a responsibility of the entire faculty and some may be opposed to this idea.

The checklist that follows has five sections. The first section requires a statement of school philosophy and objectives related to reading instruction and the other sections contain questions about various aspects of the program. Space for major strengths, weaknesses and recommendations is also provided.

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATION

- I. *School Philosophy and Objectives: (Related to Reading Instruction)*

- II. *Organization and Facilities:*

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. Is it a 7-12 or 10-12 sequential developmental program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Does the program emphasize the following:			
(a) Basic Reading Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(b) Study Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(c) Content Area Reading Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(d) Recreational Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Does the school provide the following types of program:			
(a) Corrective (for those with minor difficulties)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(b) Remedial (for those with serious difficulties)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(c) Reading Improvement (for those with academic promise)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

4. Are physical facilities and supplies in the school library or resource center adequate?
5. Is there an adequate supply of materials and equipment for corrective and remedial work?

III. *Staff:*

1. Do the teachers have adequate training for teaching reading at their level(s)?
2. Are they receptive to change?
3. Do they keep abreast of recent trends through inservice opportunities or intervisitations?
4. Are they encouraged for innovations and experimentation?

IV. *Pupils:*

1. Are they given opportunities to relate reading with other language skills?
2. Are they being continuously evaluated?
3. Are they developing permanent interests and tastes in reading?

V. *Parents:*

1. Are they familiar with the reading programs?
2. Are they given opportunities to participate in various phases of the reading programs?
3. Are they encouraged to express their opinions and make recommendations?

Major Strengths

Major Weaknesses

Recommendations

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