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TRAINING DEVELOPMENTAL READING TEACHERS—A PROPOSAL

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Many “how to study” courses, courses for training developmental reading teachers and books on the subject are merely inspirational and moralistic when they should be more realistic or relevant (a word that is becoming an irrelevant word) to the real world of school. Study habits and skills teach students to jump through hoops, most of which should not be there at all. Or, in other words, hoops which tend to stifle attitudes and negate their original purposes, i.e., standardized tests. One encounters the frustrations of either trying to change the entire system or teaching students how to beat the system. A recent statement by one of my black graduate students that “all teachers should be trained for teaching in Urban Ghettos” has significant meaning for reading teachers. The implication is that all teachers should be understanding and should know themselves as well as having various other human relations skills. If one can survive in the ghetto, he can survive anywhere. We ought to be providing the prospective developmental reading teacher with more than the traditional “how to teach reading” lecture course.

Walter Pauk’s, *How to Study in College* (4) and other similar materials outline an excellent how to study course. I suppose a traditional course in training developmental reading teachers would be concerned with the contents of such a book. Also such courses are organized around one of the many textbooks and workbooks in the area of developmental reading. Consider the contents of the majority of college developmental reading courses (5). I propose a new model for a developmental reading course for teachers.

It is my contention that the content of reading and studying may be best taught through the use of what I call a “crash course” in reading and studying. Such a “crash course” can be taught during the period of five one-hour sessions. In such a course I have found that I am able to teach an entire reading and study course to my students. In other words, I teach the entire curriculum, covering such things as the contents of *How to Study in College* (4) and the other areas of flexibility in reading, etc., in the period of five days. All of the gimmicks, handouts, etc., are presented to the students during the five-day crash course.

During the rest of the course in preparing developmental reading teachers, I feel that it is necessary, among other topics, to have discussions of the teaching act. Carl Rogers, in his recent book, *Freedom to Learn* (6) outlines many of the techniques and methodology which may be utilized. As a matter of fact, I would recommend using Rogers as the sole textbook. I recommend that the reader rush right out and buy Rogers' book now. This article is not complete without it. We reading teachers don't read enough anyway.

Some of the other components of such a course are as follows:

1. Invite some recent dropouts, upward bound students, or merely students who have been "turned off" by high school, to your class to discuss their experiences with your students in an honest straightforward manner. This experience sometimes awakens prospective and experienced teachers to conditions which might otherwise not be discussed in such a class.

2. Recent books concerned with the secondary and elementary schools today such as books by Leonard (3), Holt (1), Kozol (2) and others would be appropriate reading for students for the purpose of building a basis for discussions about the experiences that children have in our schools.

3. Rogers (6) has much to say about the free atmosphere that should prevail in such a course if developmental reading teachers are to be successful. The college professor should practice facilitating the course in such a manner that the students will be eager to emulate him when they return to their pupils.

4. Practical work with pupils is probably the most valuable component. When the crash course has been completed, urge the students to develop their own materials and *try them out* on some pupils. During the school year, classes are readily available and teachers usually welcome fresh ideas. During the summer months, it may be more difficult, but it can be done. One of my students ran an advertisement in the local paper and gathered together 20 fifth graders for a five-day course.

5. Class discussions can be facilitated easily by a close scrutiny of some of the revered theories and practices in the reading field. I feel that each student should develop a philosophy of reading based on study and discussion of the issues. This can be done only in an atmosphere of freedom as described by Rogers. The fear of the professor and grades can be overcome when we realize that no one has a monopoly on knowledge in the reading field. Some questions which might be raised to facilitate discussions are as follows:

1. Is it necessary to teach flexibility in reading, or are students generally flexible in their reading rate anyway?
2. Should students be allowed to read anything they choose, including “dirty books” or should teachers control the reading materials in a class?
3. Should we teach students short-cuts or hoop-jumping (such as text reading techniques, taking lecture notes and examsmanship) or should we attempt to change the system?
4. Are standardized tests worth the effort or are they so poor that we should rely on unobtrusive measures or diagnostic teaching?
5. What place do machines and gadgets have in a reading program?
6. Is it possible to assign a “reading level” to a book or are readability formulae a sham?
7. Can students attain higher grades by becoming speed readers?
8. How do we turn students on to reading?
9. How important is the personality of the teacher in a reading course?
10. What should be the content of a developmental reading course?—or, why read?

During any course, especially in education, where teaching is the major topic, course evaluations are the means for the professor to obtain feedback concerning the success of his endeavors. Two such evaluations are included here of a course including the above components. The first is from a forty-five-year-old teacher who had taught for twenty years. The second is from a beginning teacher.

Older Teacher

“My basic philosophy was not changed, but was enhanced and verified by the course. Because of the general approach of the instructor—fluid and free and pragmatic, I think I have become less anxious about experimenting, less rigid in regard to choice of reading matter and more accepting in general of human beings both in and beyond the reading situation.”

Younger Teacher

“As a result of the course, I did become familiar with the kinds of things one teaches in a developmental reading course. Although the more important discovery was Rogers’ *Freedom to Learn* and the

application of Rogers' techniques to the course. I appreciated particularly the inconspicuous position of the professor and the opportunity to work on a project of interest to me rather than wasting time memorizing a textbook for some inane objective exam, etc. We had the option to reject. *Freedom to Learn* has been and is probably the most significant event to occur to me since I began graduate work in education—much of which, unfortunately, was insufferably dull, rigid and routine. I do not think I will ever stand in front of a class without thinking of facilitation of learning and that students are people—they, too, would like to *be treated as people*, as I have felt I was treated in this course—with responsibility for my own learning.”

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