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The New Role of All Teachers for Improving Reading Skills (How To Survive with Less Title I Reading Money)

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

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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 pro-
gram 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 elemen-
tary 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 educa-
tion 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
With the election of Ronald Reagan as President there was an immediate clamor to fulfill the campaign promises that he had made with regard to education and particularly monies under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. Indeed, the amount of money to be allocated to the states for Title I for the current school year is from 10 to 25 percent less than in previous years.

Because of the diminished amount of money available for Title I reading programs, it is incumbent upon all teachers to assume a new and expanded role for the development of reading skills of the pupils assigned to them for instruction. In some schools special reading teachers will no longer be available to help seriously disabled readers. In many cases these students will have to remain in the regular classroom and receive help from their teacher.

The three major purposes of this article are to outline briefly the results that have been achieved in past Title I reading programs, the new role for all teachers for improving reading skills, and a prediction regarding the future of Title I reading programs.

Success of Title I Reading Programs

Title I is the largest federal program providing aid to elementary and secondary education. In the school year 1978-79, nearly five million children in over 14,000 school districts participated in Title I activities. The cost to the federal government was more than $2 billion for Title I monies. The Education Amendments of 1978 extend Title I of ESEA through September 30, 1983.

After sixteen years of experience with Title I programs, what have been the results? There is a growing body of evidence that early intervention can reverse decline and lead to dramatic increases in the achievement level of the disadvantaged pupils. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress Report shows that large gains in reading were made in the '70's among nine-year-old black students across the country. This improvement was attributed to compensatory education programs of the kind financed by Title I. Other studies favorable to Title I have been recently completed by the National Institute of Education, the Educational Testing Service, and the Stanford Research Institute. A continuing study sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation has demonstrated the importance of preschool education for disadvantaged suburban school systems including those in New York City. (1)

In the state of Nebraska, for example, over twenty thousand students (excluding kindergarten pupils) were enrolled in Title I reading programs in the 1979-80 school year. About sixty percent of the students in the reading program were male and just under ninety percent were white. Of the total, 85% were enrolled in public schools. The average student performance in Title I reading programs showed dramatic increases in achievement. In Grade 2, there was a 17.5 increase in percentile equivalence; in Grade 3 it was 13.5; and in Grade 4 it was 12.0. These data would indicate that at least in Nebraska the results of Title I reading instruction have been most positive. (2)

Mr. Gary Hoeltke, vice president of Selection Research, Inc., analyzed the test score information for the Nebraska
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 spe­
cial 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 en­
rolled 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.

REFERENCES


2. Nebraska State Department of Education. ESEA Title I Executive Summary for Fiscal Year 1980. (xeroxed)

