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ABSTRACT

Special training and professional responsibilities for reading specialists should be priority concerns of those interested in reading. There are three basic shortcomings in professional preparation today: (1) leaders and experts are inadequate; (2) course work for certification is not the crucial key to good reading teachers; and (3) too much blind devotion is placed in each approach to reading, and each of these methods has its shortcomings. The decoding approaches neglect important aspects of beginning reading instruction, such as readiness and listening experiences; the eclectic approach fails because teachers themselves are not eclectic; the language-experience approach demands creative, imaginative teachers, which 90 percent of the teachers are not; finally, the esoteric methods often fail because they are used with insufficient diagnosis and without strict adherence to the manual. To overcome these failures in reading instruction, more attention must be given to readiness of individual students. Reading instruction could also benefit by looking at "nonprofessional" reading methods that have proven successful. In addition, both reading methods instructors and reading teachers should understand and practice the basic rules for success in reading. Finally, reading teachers must teach aggressively, think positively, and work at the task of teaching. (VJ)

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SPECIAL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

At a time when the educator is plagued with a multitude of problems, it is difficult to assign priorities. Which problems would come first if they were placed in rank order? Would it be performance contracting? Voucher plans that would permit any parent to send his children to the school of his choice? Would it be the fact that, nationwide, legislators are looking at teacher tenure and teacher certification with a jaundiced eye? Would it be the problem of teacher surpluses? (It's a buyer's market!) Perhaps it would be the problem of effective reading instruction at a time when we have more methods, more material, and more trained people than we have ever had at our disposal and the incidence of reading disability is remaining constant. Many more problems beset us, but certainly the topic of Special Training and Professional Responsibilities is basic to most of the other problems and would occupy a place very near the top of such a list. For those of us concerned with reading

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instruction, I believe it would be number one.

The range of certification requirements in the various states is indeed great. It can be illustrated, however, by citing three examples: First, Oregon, which illustrates a state with maximum requirements and second, Wisconsin, which illustrates the states that fall somewhere near the middle of the spectrum; at the lower end, of course, are the 4 or 5 states which have no requirements whatever for reading specialists.

Oregon requires 42 quarter hours in the field of reading or related areas. Half, or 21 of the hours, must be at the graduate level; in actual practice they are almost all at the graduate level because undergraduates' programs are, notoriously, not crammed with reading courses.

As far as I can determine, the Oregon requirements are among the most, if not the most, rigorous in the nation. The 42 hours needed are 24 Basic hours consisting of 3 quarter hours each in:

- Education or psychology of the exceptional child (a survey course)
- Intelligence testing (a clinical course)
- Behavioral problems in children
- Diagnostic and remedial techniques in basic school subjects (exclusive of reading)
- Diagnostic and remedial techniques in reading (a clinical course)
- An advanced course in reading instruction
- Clinical practice in reading, some of which shall be in a supervised setting in the public schools.

Plus 18 quarter hours distributed in the following areas: the mentally retarded child; intelligence testing, a clinical course; speech pathology - articulation defects, retarded speech, and emotional speech problems; audiology; advanced preparation in the education of children with extreme learning problems (a clinical course), to include principles of counselling applicable to work with parents and information relative to use of social agencies in the state.

The second state we could look at is Wisconsin. A Wisconsin

teacher's license based upon a degree is required. In addition, 12

special semester credits must be obtained. Courses in remedial reading and in a remedial reading clinic are required. The remaining credits may be chosen from adolescent literature, children's literature, techniques of improving developmental reading, and techniques of teaching the mentally handicapped. Three years of teaching experience are a prerequisite to obtaining the license.

The Wisconsin requirements are, of course, minimum requirements for a remedial reading specialist. The completion of the course work leading to a Master's Degree in remedial reading would permit the student to take a number of additional courses, such as those suggested in the IRA standards. The minimum formal requirements permit the student a good deal of flexibility in planning his total graduate program. It should be noted that the minimum standards proposed by the International Reading Association for Professional Training of Reading Specialists are a great deal closer to Oregon's requirements than are those of Wisconsin.

This brings us to the somewhat embarrassing sixty-four dollar question. "Have these requirements, or those of the other states, really taken care of our ills?" Research can not, or at least does not, provide an affirmative answer. Lacking hard facts, we need to turn to subjective judgment. This source is open to question, I know, because "the good old days" never were. I also know that, in the vernacular, our defense is a series of cop-outs. We can cite arguments that many of the children in school today never stayed in school in bygone eras - that the problems are different today - competition from television and other sources never existed in the "old days" - the degree and amount of deprivation is greater today - kids used to be more motivated - and so on, and on, and on. Whether or not we buy any or all of these arguments is almost irrelevant. The problem is with us, and the need for a long and searching look for

solutions is critical. The very existence of our profession, in my opinion, hangs in the balance.

Let us explore, for a moment, some of the traps into which I think we have fallen. If we recognize our shortcomings, perhaps we can do something about them. As I see them, (and I might get read out of the lodge for voicing them!) these are three of our hang-ups:

1. The leadership, that is, the people in the ivory towers who have been telling us how to do it is "more than somewhat" inadequate. I fully realize that you don't need to be a French chef to judge whether the soup is good, but ask your next professor of reading, "How many kids have you taught to read?" Or, better yet, ask others who know his background. You might be surprised. Or, to leave the ivory tower, ask some of the "experts" from outside the establishment the same question. Or, better still, ask the teachers you know this question, "How well were you prepared to teach reading when you encountered your first class?"
2. Certification requirements. The case for extensive and intensive certification requirements is endless. But who among us will say that course work is the crucial key? We know better. I see teacher aides, adult tutors, high school helpers, and even sixth graders - none of whom have ever seen the inside of a college - doing superb jobs of teaching kids to read.
3. Our blind devotion to a single method. Broadly speaking, the methods of learning to read could be categorized as (a) a decoding approach, (b) an eclectic approach, (c) a language experience approach, (d) an esoteric approach intended only for the "basket cases" of reading disability. A detailed account of the shortcomings of each is impossible here, but, believe me, each approach has its

Achilles heel! Let me enumerate a few.

- a. Decoding. Certainly there is more to beginning reading instruction than decoding! Decoding methods are cracking a code, whether it be by use of phonics, word patterns, new alphabets with one-to-one letter-sound correspondence, or similar approaches. Most of the decoding approaches slight one or the other important aspects of beginning reading instruction such as readiness, attention to total language development, listening experiences, writing experiences, vocabulary development or comprehension skills. Any, if not all, need a lot more meat on their bones.

- b. An eclectic approach. There is little one can find wrong with the theory of an eclectic approach. To say anything adverse about the eclectic approach is somewhat like attacking motherhood. The most telling thing, however, is that the method might be eclectic but teachers are not eclectic! Until we find a way to make them so, we'll have our troubles with this approach as well.

- c. The Language Experience approach. As the proponents of this method never let us forget, this is a child-centered approach. This is, of course, true and also desirable. I am very envious of creative teachers who are really successful with this method. My contention, however, is that it takes a very imaginative, creative teacher to be successful. I put myself in the category of being, in most things, in the same boat as 90% of the teachers I see; that of being an unimaginative and uncreative clod! In short, this is an approach that not many of us can successfully use.

- d. Finally, the esoteric methods of teaching reading used chiefly by remedial teachers for the dyslexics, the true remedial cases with whom other approaches have failed. These methods such as the classic Fernald approach or the Gillingham and Stillman method cannot be condemned if they are used with the right child, with consistency and with diligence. It is no fault of the method that it is often used with insufficient diagnosis and oftentimes without strict compliance with the manual. Success with these methods depends upon the accuracy of the diagnosis of the problem and the accuracy of the recommendation.

Now that I have inflicted my biases upon you, I would be remiss if I did not have some suggestions to make. What are some of the things we need to do that transcend both certification requirements and any specific method?

First, I think we need to reassess some of our thinking about readiness. In thinking about readiness we cannot take either of the two extreme positions currently in vogue because there seems to be no middle ground between the choices. One school of thought feels that readiness is not a valid concept, that children two or three years old can and should be taught to read; that we are wasting our time if we don't get started early. The other extreme is represented by the people who feel that all sorts of dire things happen if we don't wait until the ripe old age of seven or eight to start the teaching of reading. A middle of the road approach can surely be advocated. My own view is colored by recent findings that show that 50% of the children entering first grade are not mature enough to achieve what is expected of them in beginning reading. In discussing the two extremes of thought about readiness, I'd like to share with you a tongue-in-cheek proposal that Louise Ames of the Gesell

Institute recently made about her position on readiness. She said:

"I propose that no child be permitted to learn to read until third grade -- that teachers in kindergarten to second grade be instructed to thwart any evidence of a child's disobeying this rule. In this way, every kid who is ready to read, somewhere between three and seven, will have to learn on the sly, by himself. He'll have to sneak books under the covers and learn by flashlight. When he goes to the public library he'll have to stand on tiptoe and lie about his age, making reading just about the most exciting pastime ever invented.

"Under my plan a child could even get to be 8 years old without feeling that he is a hopeless moron who will never learn anything.

"And when he is ready, shall his teacher teach him to read? Not on your life. Teachers have been too corrupted by reading theories. The ones to teach the third graders ought to be the sixth graders -- and not necessarily the best readers. There is evidence to suggest that the best reading teachers are children having trouble learning to read themselves.

"I predict that if my system were to be adopted, there would soon be an underground movement dealing in contraband books and that our children would manage to outwit us -- learning to read in their own good time, but ready for anything by third grade."

Isn't THAT an interesting idea! In any event, we need to pay more than lip service to readiness for reading instruction.

Second, I would like to propose that we need to take a much more-in-depth look at reading instruction. Not the nitty-gritty of which consonants, vowels, or rules we need to teach first, but at some of the ways that the "non-professionals" are achieving success. For example:

What is it that makes non-professionals, untrained free schoolers, Head Start, older poor readers teaching younger poor readers, the Hooked On Books approach, and other attempts so successful? There is so very much to learn! Lets cast aside, for a moment at least, our pet methods and look at other people and other ways that work. Ways that work with our failures.

Third, let's make sure that we, and our teachers, really understand and practice the rules for success in beginning reading -- the rules for success in all learning. Briefly summarized these are:

1. Secure the learner's cooperation. An active, willing participant is a more ready and efficient learner than the passive spectator.
2. Begin instruction on the learner's level. To do this the teacher must first have a clear picture of the pupil's present skill development and his capacity for further achievement.
3. Take small steps. Borrow a tenet from programmed learning: make each step so small that a correct response is virtually assured.
4. Reinforce success. If possible, make the success experience its own reinforcement.
5. Keep learning tasks and materials meaningful. Research has pretty conclusively made clear that meaningful tasks and materials are mastered more readily than materials that have no meaning for the learner.
6. Facilitate remembering. Teachers can combat forgetting by taking care to see that unique features of each new learning are stressed and understood.
7. Encourage pupil discovery of relationships. Transfer of learning to new tasks is most likely to occur if pupils are able to discover important relationships and generalizations for themselves.
8. Guard against motivation that is too intense. Too much of a good thing can be harmful.
9. Build a backlog of success experiences. Pupils' tolerance for failure is derived from their reserve of success experiences.
10. Energetic and aggressive teaching works wonders. Look around you at the best teachers you know. They work at it!
11. Adopt a positive philosophy. If you don't have one, maybe you could adopt that of the late John F. Kennedy who said, "I believe that one man can make a difference and that every man should try."

Finally, we need to make certain that we have teachers who teach aggressively, think positively, and who work at the task; not teachers who teach off the top of their heads, but teachers who have more than one method at their command. Teachers who firmly believe that teaching reading is their single most important task. And last, but not least, make certain that all teachers teach reading -- middle grade teachers, upper grade teachers, subject matter secondary teachers -- even junior college teachers. If all of this should come to pass, certification would become a secondary, not a primary problem!

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