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ABSTRACT

The development of American vocational education has evolved to a well-defined program of a practical orientation that has led the vocationally oriented students to define his goal so narrowly that no room is left for reading skills needed in coping with the burgeoning changes and innovations of modern business and industry. The first goal of reading instruction to vocational students should be to have them become proficient in basic reading skills which they can apply directly to the use of content materials in his chosen field. The development of reading skills should begin by using individualized reading materials and follow a controlled sequence which allows adjustment for student differences. Then the students should have the opportunity to apply these skills to textbooks and magazines covering topics related to his job interest. Preparing the vocationally oriented reader to enter his world of work requires curriculum tailoring designed by drawing on the expertise of vocational, general study, and counseling staff members. Team teaching of vocational and reading instructors would prove helpful. An illustration of such a reading program for vocational students is the reading-study skills laboratory at the Madison Area Technical College. References are included. (AW)

# THE VOCATIONALLY-ORIENTED READER

by Douglas H. Schewe

In The Improvement of Reading, the authors see the reading program as similar to a suit of clothes, for in

> no other discipline is the need for individualized instruction so apparently crucial (15, pp. 41-43).

The good reading instructor, therefore, being an expert tailor, begins with the client, "Who is he? What does he want?"

## DEFINING THE VOCATIONALLY-ORIENTED READER.

### Emphasis on the Practical.

In Wisconsin the student eligible for admission to a vocational, technical and adult school is any resident or municipal employee who is at least "16 years of age (22)". Vocational education,

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specifically,

> is designed to provide individuals with skills, knowledges, (sic), and attitudes for initial entrance into, and advancement within, occupations or groups of related occupations requiring a relatively high proportion of manipulative skills (21, p. 6).

as distinguished from technical education

> in which success is dependent largely upon technical information and understanding of the laws and principles of mathematics, science, and technology (25, p. 16).

The vocational student today, as Veblen over half a century ago already observed, has a single-minded determination "to make much of all things that bear the signature of the 'practical'," meaning, to Veblen, "useful for private gain (16, p. 41)...." Typically the student, Harry L. Miller observes,

> brings to vocational education a consistently high level of motivation. His purpose is generally clear and the rewards for effort are fairly visible (10, p. 11).

Such clarity of motivation is both a boon and an obstacle to the reading instructor--it brings to the teacher clearly defined objectives toward which reading instruction can be related, but often the student so narrowly defines his occupational goal to leave no room for all the reading skills required in coping with the burgeoning changes and innovations of modern business and industry.

There is nothing "practical", Silberman points out in Crisis in the Classroom, in an education which prepares workers for the work-a-day world as the student envisions it today. To be truly "practical"

> an education should prepare them for work that does not yet exist and whose nature cannot be imagined (11, pp. 113-114).

Why is it the vocational student today defines occupational education in such narrow terms? American history provides a partial answer.

Historical Development.

Merle Curti points out that in the decades prior to the election of Andrew Jackson, American intellectual life was primarily based on values of the patrician class, i.e., classical, liberal, humanistic education. These aristocratic concepts prevailed despite Washington's earlier advice, in his Farwell Address, that diffusion of knowledge was of prime importance in a republic.

Under Jackson, however, establishment and growth of the western frontier brought a new quality to our country's values. The grinding daily labor, which "never ceased from morn to night, from winter to summer (4, p. 265)", developed in an increasingly influential segment of the American population a regard for academic learning as not only useless, but often as a handicap.[1]

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1. It is not to be thought, however, that this is an attitude originating in the United States. A popular French writer, in 1830, expresses a similar view of education through nouveau riche lumberman Sorel, "Julien was reading a book. Nothing could have been more disagreeable to old Sorel...this passion for reading was hateful to him, as he didn't know how to read himself (1, p. 13)".

What was important was what was "practical", what helped one to fell the forest and set up business.

However, the strong desire for the "practical" and success through free enterprise did not develop a feeling of "status". Consequently, Curti believes philanthropy arose as

> a part of the defense of business against criticism of radical theorists and class-conscious urban workers (4. pp. 298-99)....

By the First World War, defense of the "practical" was so deeply ingrained in concepts of vocational education as to become part of the tenets expressed by educational leaders. Two principles of Charles R. Prosser, written at this time, exemplify the attitude:

> Vocational education will be effective in proportion as it retrains the individual directly and specifically in the thinking habits and the manipulative habits required in the occupation itself.

And for

> every occupation there is a body of content which is peculiar to that occupation and which practically has no functioning value in any other occupation (11, pp. 192-219).

"Practical" pressures culminated in the early 1900's--increasing need for skilled labor and finally American involvement in war in Europe--resulting, as Venn believes, in a majority belief, that

> Educational decisions <u>had</u> to be made during these years and <u>were</u> made, not because of educational consensus but rather societal pressure to get a job done (17, p. 53).

As a result, governmental aid to vocational education began under the Smith-Hughes Act as

> categorical aid only within narrowly defined limits, the Federal influence in the development of state programs was strong (17, p. 59).

The beginnings of American vocational education, we can see, evolved from a well-defined program of the "practical", the immediate need to get things done. Such narrowly defined educational parameters, led educator, social critic Thorstein Veblen to write at that time

> Vocational training is training for proficiency in some gainful occupation, and it has no connection with higher education.... The prime mover in the case is presumably the current unreflecting propensity to make much of all things that bear the signature of the practical (16, pp. 140-41).

Vocational education, from its earliest days, was defensive of its place in higher education. Patrician values have prevailed in education to today, leading United States Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland to comment

> We are so preoccupied with higher education that it has become a national fetish. High schools measure their success by the number of their students who go on to college.... People view vocational education as a great thing for the neighbor's children.

Consequently, Commissioner Marland has dedicated his administration to spreading the concept that

> a first-rate artisan who works with his hands is held in as high esteem as the graduate of a liberal arts college.

For

> the nation no longer has a place for a person who is not going on to college and doesn't possess a salable skill (8, p. 2 and 52).

As a result, and not surprisingly, the vocational student comes to reading believing "there is no place for the trained worker who does not have a salable skill", strongly convinced there definitely is "a body of content which is peculiar to that occupation" he has chosen and that traditional education is of slight value.

Vocationally-Oriented Readers at MATC.

Vocationally-oriented readers at the Madison Area Technical College (MATC) are similar to those described by Strang et al. (15, pp. 66-67) and Goodwin (6). They range roughly in age from the late teens into the middle forties, may be high school drop-outs, recent graduates, or those who are beginning vocational training after a lapse from school of several years.

All students at MATC can elect to take a basic, a high school or a post-high school reading course. Ninety-nine students were required by the administration to take a reading-study skills laboratory. The requirement was made of students who had 1) received a raw score of 11 or below on the American College Testing Program Examination (ACT), b) been in the bottom ten percent of their high school class, and/or c) come to the college with a recommendation that further work be taken in reading.

The table in this paper shows how these ninety-nine students placed on the Nelson Reading Test (3-9, Form A). An approximate assessment of each student's percentile on national college freshmen norms was made by giving each student's reading grade placement on the Nelson test the same percentile as that grade placement would have been given if attained on the Nelson-Denny test. The reasons for using this test, normed on a junior high population, were to enable the instructors to roughly assess how many were reading above or below the eighth grade level, and to determine more specifically how serious was the need for instruction by those placing below the eighth grade level.

Those found reading below the eighth grade level were strongly encouraged to take the five-day-a-week, non-credit, developmental reading course.[2] Others were encouraged to take either the credit, five-day-a-week high school or post-high school reading course. Few, however, actually made changes mainly because vocational courses include large blocks of laboratory-type instruction which precludes electing little outside the requirements in the chosen vocational program and still allow time for the family responsibility most students have.

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2. Since then, the developmental reading course has been divided into a basic and developmental reading class, the former for those who are reading with below fourth grade reading skills and the latter for those reading with between fourth and eighth grade reading skills. In MATC the various reading classes are entitled basic, developmental and reading improvement classes. An advanced reading class curriculum has been written.

From the table, it can be seen that 56 students placed below the 11th percentile for college freshmen, placing them in the 17th percentile, or below, for high school seniors. Though 43 students placed above the 11th percentile, working with these students revealed all were in need of how-to-study skill development. Those below the 11th percentile, in addition, needed development of basic reading skills, i.e., reading skills of the junior-high level or below.

TABLE OF READING SCORES
found among
MATC Vocational Students
Taking a Required Reading Laboratory

| Percentile--College Freshmen Norms | Reading Score Grade Placement | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|
| - 5 | 3.3 - 8.0 | 35 |
| 6 - 10 | 8.1 - 9.3 | 21 |
| 11 - 15 | 9.4 - 10.1* | 16 |
| 16 - 25 | 10.2 - 11.0 | 18 |
| 26 - 35 | 11.1 - 12.2 | 6 |
| 36 - 50 | 12.3 - 13.0 | 3 |
| TOTAL STUDENTS. . . . . | | 99 |

*Scores above this level exceeded the reliability of the administered Nelson Reading Test. If any student had elected to take a Reading Improvement Class, he would have been given a California junior-high or advanced reading test.

Students taking required-reading meet for two hours each week. One hour is spent working with individualized reading, either textbook or laboratory reading material; a second hour is spent in learning basic study skills, applying these to practice material, or to chapters assigned by vocational teachers in textbooks. Challenge to Reading Instruction.

The broad objective in assigning academically weak students to the reading-study skill laboratories was to lead them on a new academic path, to attempt to prevent, what Frank Riesman calls, the "recycling of failure". Riesman charges that we, as educators of adults, have a responsibility "to do more than reproduce failure for these students at an adult level (12)".

Prevention of "recycling of failure" is perhaps the basic challenge facing instructors working with the vocationally-oriented reader--teaching the student to think in a literate world which is foreign to him, a world for which his background has not prepared him. Reading is not seen by the student as an integral part of his education. Doing the job, not reading about it, is penultimate--the ultimate, as Veblen observed, is making money.

Educators, in contrast, envision a larger role for education in the world of work. They, like Harry L. Miller, see general studies as essential to education because it is

> a way of helping individuals grow in basic human intellectual skills, in social understanding, and

> insight, which transcends immediate application to a specific job (10, p. 79)....

Restating this objective in terms closer to the vocational student, D. Wessels, presently Associate Director of Instructional Services at MATC, and until recently Chairman of the Trade and Industry Campus, tells vocational and technical students,

> What we teach here in T & I is what will help you get a job. What is taught you by general studies will help you keep that job (18).

Charles E. Silberman (14) recently popularized this concept when he wrote that vocational education has the responsibility, in addition to teaching students how to learn, to apply man's accumulated wisdom to earning a living. This must be taught to the student who today reflects the frontier spirit of education by believing, as Marya Mannes recently said, "Knowledge is bad for you. The past is dead. The amateur is king (9)".

Jerome S. Bruner, advises that relevancy of education requires vocational students be taught not only how to operate physical objects, but also to see parallel ways to work with his knowledge and proficiency "as it is encoded in language and other specialized symbol systems (3, p. 112)". Going beyond the definition of vocational education given by Prosser, Bruner states the objective is

> to produce skill in our citizens, skill in the achieving of goals of personal significance, and of assuring a society in which personal significance can still be possible (3, p.117).

In other words, the objective of vocational education is to develop high occupational esteem by preparing skilled workers who can meet foreseen and unimagined eventualities in the world of work.

## SCOPE OF READING INSTRUCTION

Reading test scores estimate a student's ability at the time the test is administered. As each begins work, the reading instructor is alert to continually discover more about the student's ability and, very importantly, to help the student become more aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, preparing him to become self-sufficient so he can modify his training to meet newly arising demands in the world of work.[3] Of additional interest to the student, making him aware of his reading skills provides an opportunity for him to discover which reading skills are most needed for vocational development.

Individualized Instruction.

Teaching reading to vocationally-oriented students, as we have seen, presents a Janus-faced challenge. The first is to have the student become proficient in basic skills,

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3. In speaking of the teacher, Gibran writes, "He who is versed in the science of numbers can tell you of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thether. For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man (5, pp. 62-63)".

i.e., the lowest level of reading at which each student places. Wherever the student is, the reading instructor will select individualized reading material to begin developing reading skills at this level.

Development of reading skills will follow a scope and sequence ranging from vocabulary development through paragraph reading to critical analytical reading, if the student is ready. Control of reading skills through the most reasonable sequence, making adjustment for student differences, is the major contribution reading classes make to an instructional program.

Secondly, the student must be given practice in applying the reading skills being taught to other classes as well as to the world of work and leisure. In vocational education, application to the world of work and leisure involves transferring reading skills to vocational textbooks and popular magazines covering topics related to the student's job interest.

Reading instructors are already familiar with published materials available for individualized instruction. And, all realize that individualized reading laboratories and materials alone are not enough. For as Strang, McCullough and Traxler have observed,

> Individualized reading does not in itself constitute a reading program; in the main it serves as a valuable part of a well-balanced reading program. Used exclusively, it may cause neglect of systematic instruction in reading skills and may lead the pupil to practice errors (15, p. 52).

And, they may have added, as we have observed at MATC, students tend to become lonely when working only with these materials. Independence is not one of the qualities used to describe most adademically weak students. Perhaps, if many of them had earlier developed habits of independence, they would not be reaching their late teens with inadequate reading skills.

Therefore, at MATC, all reading classes include a variety of materials selected to balance individual work with classroom discussion and group practice. Group participation is encouraged by a common text-workbook in fundamental reading skills and vocabulary. Individualized instruction is effected through multi-level paperbacks, reading laboratory practice, controlled readers, and supplementary workbooks from which portions are selected to give reinforcement where needed.

However, as we have seen, the vocationally-oriented reader has an all-consuming interest in the job which he expects to get upon completion of the program he is taking. Often he has selected a community college because he has been turned off by the "academic" life as he perceives it.

The vocationally-oriented student in the community college is older than the student encountered in public schools. He has had more of life's experiences. Consequently, he is more rigidly certain what he wants.

But even with this certainty he does not actively apply classroom learning to his world of work. For him, as well as for all students, "transfer does not occur automatically (7, p.18)", as Herber repeatedly reminds us. When a reading class or laboratory is grouped by students from only one or two vocational areas

> Regular curriculum materials--basic and supplementary texts --can be used as vehicles for reading instruction in each content area with teachers showing students how to become successful readers of the required materials (7, p.11).

When practicing with such materials in a reading class, the instructor will develop vocational independence in each student by having each scan and/or skim content sources for answers to self-developed survey questions. For teaching reading in content areas is, perhaps more than anything else, helping the student to ask incisive questions of reading material in a way which will enable him to formulate readily remembered, "practical" answers.

What is "practical" to him in school is what will help him "get through" his tests and what he thinks he will need on his job Questionnaires sent throughout the years by our student services department reveal that graduates in the first year or two in the work world find vocational subjects have been of most help. However, follow-up questionnaires reveal that after they have been on the job for a few years, general study courses are reported having been most helpful. Therefore, it is requisite that content

materials used in reading instruction draw not only from assigned textboooks but also include related sources found in college libraries, i.e., magazines, journals, handbooks, special guides, statistical reports, etc.

Using the library also provides opportunity to assist students in surveying and applying information available from related introductory texts, programmed handbooks, and adio-visual aids which can help renew course prerequisites when the student finds he has a difficiency. The wide range of abilities and the wide variation in preparation which students bring to vocational programs makes it essential that each becomes proficient in using remedial resources. Remediation is most effective when the student's survey and question preparation for reading reveals a deficiency. Waiting until after a test is given, particularly if it is a six-weeks exam, may be too late.

The T & I library at MATC has an introductory session on using available specialized occupational references for each vocational program. It is the reading instructors' responsibility to see tha the students become proficient in the use of these materials.

When practice with content materials raises questions which cannot be clarified by available resources, the reading instructor will see an answer is obtained from the person most qualified to handle that question, the vocational teacher. An answer may be

requested directly from the vocational teacher or through a student assigned to report back from the instructor.

Reading in the Vocational Classroom.

Inviting the reading instructor into the vocational class and laboratory is a valuable part in teaching the vocationally-oriented reader.

First, such an opportunity enables a bridge to be spanned across the separation which exists between various classes. Second, extension of the invitation shows students that reading is a "real" part of the world of work.

By observing the reading instructor in the vocational classroom, the vocational instructor will obtain ideas for pre-reading questions which will help students tackle new assignments. Reading instructors will come away from such periods with a realistic idea of which reading skills should be emphasized in reading classes taken by vocational students.

Also, team teaching will enable vocational and reading instructors to cooperatively write exercises which will make relevant the reading skills being taught.

Reading in General Studies Classrooms.

To give dimension and flexibility to a student's knowledge vocational programs contain general study courses which usually include, even in one year diploma programs, mathematics, science, communications, and human relations. Problems found in vocational classrooms

are also found in general study classes, i.e., wide range of abilities and interests, lack of basic skills, preparatory courses which over-prepare a student for some course aspects, etc.

To cope with these problems, MATC is considering undertaking multi-level instruction in some first semester, introductory courses. Under the proposal each section composing a course will have the same final objectives. Students in the lower sections will work more slowly through what Herber (4) calls literal and interpretive course questions; while, the upper sections will more quickly cover the literal and interpretive aspects of the same course concentrating on developing skills in applying the content of the course.[4]

At the end of the semester, students receiving adequate grades (i.e., perhaps "A's" and "B's" in the lower section and "A" through "C's" in the higher sections) would go on to the second semester of the course. Those receiving lower grades would be strongly encouraged to see student counseling.

With the counselor, the student would go over his past academic record, standarized test result, school performance and present family-personal situation. From a discussion of such matters, he and the counselor could decide if the student were to 1) select another field in which he might more readily attain proficiency, or 2) continue in the same program with some behavioral modification.

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4. In terms of Bloom (1) and Sanders (11), instruction in the lower aspects of the course will concentrate on memory, translation, and interpretation questions; while, instruction in the higher sections of the course will work on application and analysis of the content of the course. The lower sections would pursue the cognitive domain of the course from 1.00 through 2.20 categories; while the latter sections would explore 2.30, 3, and perhaps some 4 aspects of the course.

For example, it might be suggested the student continue in his present vocational program on a provisional basis. One provision of his continuing might be that he take a five-day a week reading-study laboratory or a reading development class. The skills laboratory might meet as a reading-study skills group two days a week. The remaining three hours could be taken in an open reading laboratory where the student would prepare class assignments according to good study techniques.

In addition, multi-level curriculum planning may not be of assistance only to the individual community college, but might also contribute to defining the unique role of "the programs offered by vocational, technical and adult education schools and other institutions of higher education (20)"--a 1971 legislative mandate to education. Multi-level curriculum planning might indicate community colleges will concentrate in developing the memory, translation, and interpretation levels of education; while four-years colleges and state universities would accept students having a sound foundation in these skills to pursue the higher application, analysis and evaluation of knowledge.

Summary.

Teaching the vocationally-oriented reader, we have seen, begins by making the student more proficient in using content material in his chosen field. Such teaching utilizes the full-range of vocational resources available on the campus and thereby enables

each student to progress according to his ability and desire. Preparing the vocationally-oriented reader to enter his world-of-work requires curriculum tailoring designed by drawing on the expertise of vocational, general study and counseling staff members. From such cooperation, as Goodwin writes, it may well be possible "to change a student's direction from a probable drop-out to a probable college graduate (6)".

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