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ABSTRACT
        The problem of this conference panel was to develop a
research and development agenda to improve the reading and writing
proficiencies of high school graduates. This panel report consists of
four approaches to the problem: studies of the problems of
ill-prepared high school students; surveys of the reading and writing
tests used by colleges and universities; analysis and description of
intervention programs implemented at the college level, including
positive and negative results; and exploration of new instructional
strategies in order to understand the pedagogical directions of
successful experiences and the ways of encouraging commitment to new
approaches. A bibliography is included. (JM)

reading comprehension and the high school graduate

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CONFERENCE ON STUDIES IN READING

"It was unlawful, as well as
unsafe, to teach a slave to
read.
    'It will forever unfit him
to be a slave. He will at once
become unmanageable and of no
value to his master.'
These words sank deep into my
heart. From that moment, I
understood the pathway from
slavery to freedom. Though
conscious of the difficulty of
learning without a teacher, I
set out with high hope and fixed
purpose, at whatever cost of
trouble, to learn how to read."

                    Frederick Douglass

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

                Washington, D.C.
              · September 1975

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NIE CONFERENCE ON STUDIES IN READING

PANEL 7

READING COMPREHENSION AND THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

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PANEL 7

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The National Institute of Education (NIE) came into being during 1972. Its authorizing legislation requires the NIE to:

- Help solve or alleviate the problems of, and achieve the objectives of, American Education.

- Advance the practice of education as an art, science, and profession.

- Strengthen the scientific and technological foundations of education.

- Build an effective education research and development system.

In order to aid in meeting these general objectives, the National Council on Education Research (NIE's policymaking body) approved the creation of five priority programs in December, 1973. One of the priority programs was Essential Skills.* Its purpose was:

To investigate through research and development, ways to aid all children to obtain skills essential for functioning adequately in school and society.

The initial focus of the Essential Skills Program was in the area of reading. Broad guidelines for an NIE effort in reading had been developed in a small conference held on Cape Cod during the late summer of 1973.** During 1974, the Essential Skills Program carried out an intensive effort designed to formulate more specific plans for funding research and development activities in reading. A variety of meetings were held with groups of teachers, school administrators, and scientists to designate directions for the program. The most ambitious of the meetings was held in Washington, D.C., in August, 1974, and directly involved over 175 individuals -- 50 as Conference participants and 125 as consultants to the Conference. This report is the product of one of the 10 panels of the August Conference.

The impetus for the Conference stemmed from a number of concerns about the state of Federal funding of research and development in education. Four concerns stood out in particular for reading.

1. Research in the field of reading was fragmented and noncumulative.

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*During the past few months, the Essential Skills Program has been renamed the Learning Division of the Basic Skills Group. Both the Basic Skills Group and the Learning Division continue to follow the guidelines set out by the National Council in December, 1973 (above).
**See Miller, George A. (ed.) Linguistic Communication: Perspective for Research, International Reading Association; Newark, Delaware, 1974, 45 pp.

2. The Federal Government was not making constructive use of the state of knowledge in the field in their 'ecisions to fund new research and development.

3. There was a lack of positive and firm coordination between the Federal Government and the professional research and practitioner organizations around the country.

4. A large number of scientists in a variety of disciplines carry out research with relevance to reading. We considered it important to attract these scientists to work in the applied areas of educational research.

The Conference itself was a step in meeting these concerns. During the past year, the NIE has been developing plans for funding research and development in reading for the next two years. Suggestions from the Conference have played an important role in this process. But planning is an on-going process and we hope by publishing and widely disseminating the reports from the Conference to stimulate discussion of the reports, of research and development in the field of reading, and, indirectly, of the plans of the Institute.

To some extent the format for the Conference was influenced by three other similar efforts of the Federal Government. In the area of health research, the conferences leading to the National Cancer Plan and the National Heart and Lung Institute Plan served as partial models. Within NIE, the Teaching Division had held a major planning effort in the area of teaching research during the early summer of 1974. The intent in each of these efforts was to develop a coherent set of documents that would be responsive to the needs of the American public and to knowledge in the field.

We felt it necessary to structure the Conference in two important ways. First, after extensive consultation with scientists and practitioners in the field we arrived at the conclusion that major efforts in the past had often ignored or down-played the critical importance of the stage of reading called "reading comprehension." Although we realized the impossibility of actually separating out "reading comprehension" from the earlier stage of learning to read -- which requires the learner to be able to translate written letters and words into speech -- our advice suggested that the comprehension or "reading for meaning" stage required far more attention than it had received in the past. Consequently, seven of the ten panels focused on problems in this area. Second, to direct the focus of the panels to planning future research we requested the panelists to organize their ideas into general approaches within the problem area, within the approaches to suggest programs for research, and, finally, when possible to specify particular research or development projects.

The seven panels addressing problems in comprehension spanned a wide range of concerns. The first three panels focused on basic research issues. Their panel reports are titled: Semantics, Concepts, and Culture; The Structure and Use of Language; and Attention and Motivation. The fourth panel was asked to consider the problem of Modeling the Reading Process. The fifth panel directed its attention to the issue of measuring how well people read and its report is titled Assessment of Reading Comprehension. The sixth and seventh reports directed themselves respectively at the practical problems of the Application of Existing Reading Comprehension Research and Reading Comprehension and the High School Graduate. The final three panels directed their attention to three pressing concerns in early reading: Learning and Motivation in Early Reading; Reading Strategies for Different Cultural and Linguistic Groups; and Essential Skills and Skill Hierarchies in Reading.

Although the reports have undergone some revision and editing since the Conference, the major part of the work was done in concentrated sessions in the space of a few days. The resulting documents are not polished or exhaustive. They are meant to be working documents to stimulate debate, suggestions, and comments. Such comments or requests for other reports should be directed to:

> Director, Learning Division
> National Institute of Education
> Washington, D.C. 20208

The work of organizing the Conference was carried out by members of the Essential Skills staff at the NIE -- each of the panels had an NIE staff person as a permanent liaison. Special acknowledgments are due to Susan Duffy and Donald Fisher for their assistance in preparing the reports for publication and to Arthur Young & Company for coordination and arrangements before, during, and after the Conference. Finally, the work of NIE cannot proceed without the kind of skill, involvement, and hard work given by the panel chairpeople, panelists, and consultants for this Conference. The ideas and emphases in the reports are the products of their cumulative expertise.

> Marshall S. Smith
> Conference Chairperson

LIST OF PANEL REPORTS AND CHAIRPERSONS

1. Semantics, Concepts, and Culture, Dr. George Miller, Rockefeller
    University

2. The Structure and Use of Language, Dr. Thomas Trabasso, Princeton
    University

3. Attention and Motivation, Dr. Sheldon White, Harvard University

4. Modeling the Reading Process, Dr. Richard Venezky, Wisconsin
    University

5. Assessment of Reading Comprehension, Dr. Ernst Rothkopf, Bell
    Laboratories

6. Application of Existing Reading Comprehension Research,
    Dr. Lauren Resnick, University of Pittsburgh

7. Reading Comprehension and the High School Graduate,
    Dr. Mina Shaugnessy, City University of New York

8. Learning and Motivation in Early Reading, Dr. Richard Hodges,
    University of Chicago

9. Reading Strategies for Different Cultural and Linguistic Groups,
    Dr. Manuel Ramirez, University of California, Santa Cruz

10. Essential Skills and Skill Hierarchies in Reading, Dr. Irene Athey,
    University of Rochester

PANEL 7

READING COMPREHENSION AND THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Area Statement

The stated goal of public education in the United States has long
been to equip all citizens with the necessary skills and information
to live productive and fulfilling lives as defined by the society and
by each individual within that society. However, hundreds of thousands
of young adults, whose educational needs differ in many respects from
those of "typical" college students, have entered college during the
past decade. Their lack of traditional educational knowledge and
skills has dramatically heightened our awareness of how far short of
our goal we have fallen.

The entry of the "new" students into higher education is part of
a much larger cultural and economic shift that has occurred in our
society during the last ten years. The reasons for this shift are
complex, but certainly include:

1. Students' awareness that they have access to and a right
    to opportunities denied their parents;

2. The rising demand for skilled workers in an increasingly
    service-oriented society;

3. Society's widespread view that there are advantages in
    cultivating individual talents and interests, not only
    as economic assets but as a means of enriching and humanizing
    one's life.

It would be inaccurate to say that "nontraditional" college
students from diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds have
been totally ignored in the past. For years, many State colleges and
universities have accepted underprepared freshmen, provided they were
high school graduates and residents of the State. Other types of
institutions have recently adopted similar policies in response to the
increasing demand for educational equality. The creation of large
numbers of community colleges, the adoption of open admission policies
in many public colleges, and the efforts of private colleges to enroll
students from diverse backgrounds directly reflect this trend. But
with few exceptions (e.g., reading clinics), these institutions have
taken little note of the educational needs of such students, subscribing
instead to a "revolving door" policy. This policy has generally resulted
in a high percentage of "rejects" at the end of the freshman year.

Estimates of the number of inadequately prepared freshmen vary.
Not all of the freshmen whose reading and writing skills fall below
levels adequate for college work are from socially or economically dis-
advantaged backgrounds. For instance, the National Reading Center
reported that one-third of all freshmen who entered college in the Fall
of 1972 lacked the basic reading skills they needed to meet minimal

requirements for college study (National Reading Center, 1972).
R. H. Finch stated that more than <u>half</u> of the two-year college students
are in need of remedial or compensatory programs (Finch, 1969). Paul
Panes, a consultant to this panel, noted that "students functioning on
approximately a junior high school instructional reading level, 7th to
9th grade, constitute as high as 50 to 60 percent of an entering fresh-
man class in some community colleges in New York City. In some schools,
however, specifically where bilingualism is predominant, the percentage
may go up to 80 percent. The situation in the senior colleges may be
somewhat better, but nevertheless, similar groups exist." (Panes, 1974)

The higher education community has begun to realize that this
problem is not diminishing. The noted American historian Frederick
Jackson Turner observed more than 50 years ago the need for educational
adaptation to societal change: "Nothing in our educational history is
more striking than the steady pressure of democracy upon its universities
to adapt them to the requirements of all people." (Turner, 1920). As
we now turn our attention to the large numbers of students requesting
higher education who are lacking the basic skills of reading and writing,
we have overwhelming proof of the relevance of Turner's statement to
the critical situation facing us in the seventies. Clearly, the problem
of underprepared freshmen needs attention.

Awakened to this significant educational problem, educators are
becoming more aware of their own limitations in providing effective
education for the "new students." Just as the "new students" are not
prepared for colleges as they presently exist, so the colleges, with
all their physical, intellectual, and human resources, are not prepared
for the "new students." The problems of the colleges stem from a number
of sources:

1. The majority of college teachers do not seem to have a sense
   of what has been happening educationally to these students
   before they arrive on the college campus. Aware that the
   students did not acquire sufficient reading and writing skills,
   the teachers are less able to assess the positive experiences
   and skills the new students <u>have</u> acquired in the process of
   growing up in America in the 20th century, e.g., those skills
   acquired through early employment or family responsibilities.

2. Many college teachers (untrained in pedagogy) do not know how
   to teach the new students. Aware of the pedagogical principle
   that one must begin from scratch, they are uncertain of where
   "scratch" is, and of how to determine the starting point when
   teaching such fundamental skills as reading and writing--
   skills students traditionally master sufficiently before their
   arrival at college.

3. Many college teachers have difficulty bridging the gap between
   research and practice. This problem becomes apparent when one
   asks educators to relate basic or even applied research to the

actual classroom situation, even when there is an awareness
of and familiarity with research in reading, writing, language,
psychology, and so on. Many college teachers are not certain
of the curricular implications of this research for their
students.

4. There is uncertainty about the kinds of institutional accommo-
dations necessary to meet the needs of the new students. For
example, what modifications or adaptations can institutions
and teachers make in (a) traditional courses and course sequence;
(b) hiring new teachers and/or retraining old teachers; (c) opti-
mal class size; (d) fitting specialists in reading and writing,
traditionally associated with the lower grades, into the academic
organization to maximize their potential contribution to both
students and faculty?

These are a few of the questions that educators now seek to answer
and that any research and development agenda on the reading and writing
problems of high school graduates must attempt to address. This panel's
opinion is that although we can and must search out much of value in the
body of experience and research that already exists, there remain many
questions to explore, many assumptions and intuitions to test, and many
experiences to assess before colleges are ready to meet their responsi-
bilities to the new students.

Until now, several conditions have hindered research. Until
recently, most postsecondary institutions had only a small number of
new students and therefore gave only minimal attention to this popula-
tion's problems. Arlene Fingeret, Director of the Education Warehouse
in Cambridge, Massachusetts, writes:

due to larger numbers of students who are inadequately
prepared for traditional college-level reading who are
now enrolling in higher educational institutions, the
problems of the adult poor reader are finally becoming
societal priorities. There have been, for many years,
adult education programs offering improvement in the
literacy skills instruction for adults, but these
programs have not provided, initiated, or been encouraged
in any way to do the research and development that is
needed in the field in order for them to be able to
maximize their service delivery capabilities. When
the research has been done, and materials developed,
they have not been able to or encouraged to share
them in any broad way. (Fingeret, 1974)

However, beyond this reason there may have been and may still be
deep doubts about the native abilities of these students either to
acquire a high proficiency level in the basic skills of reading and
writing or to grasp the content of typical college courses. Many

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college faculty and even some of the general public have a strong conviction that at the time students enter college it is too late to "catch up" in reading and writing, no matter what their talents may be. Such "linguistic fatalism," which holds that significant linguistic development has been reached by age 18 and probably much before that age, reinforces the idea that underprepared incoming college freshmen are the "old people" in the developmental process: Students of the 11th hour whose prospects for improvement are too frail to warrant significant educational and/or economic investments, particularly in the traditional time-frame (4 years) of college.

This panel, however, believes that the underprepared college freshman (18 years or older) is indeed capable of further learning, specifically of mastering language skills. Some evidence for this belief is anecdotal, some is historical, and some is found in the research in education journals.

In conversations of college faculty and administrators the topic of low achievers, or of underprepared or "high-risk" students inevitably arises. People are always able to point to at least one "success story" on their campus.

Looking back at the crash efforts of the Armed Services during World War II, one can gather historical evidence. The services made a positive attempt to advance the reading level of low achievers in the military and to train highly skilled personnel (technicians, mechanics, and so on) from a pool of men, many of whom lacked high-level reading and study skills; often they were low performers in high school. Further evidence comes from the persistent efforts of southern Black colleges. These institutions had "high school departments" aimed at underskilled Black youth. The Defense Department's "100,000" program in the late sixties reveals more recent evidence. This program was specifically aimed at young men considered noncollege material, more often than not high school dropouts or pushouts. The educational benefits available to veterans since World War II have shown us both a positive approach to new students and possible evidence that such an approach gives society untold social and economic benefits. War on Poverty programs, e.g., Upward Bound, Job Corps, Youth-Tutoring-Youth, Neighborhood Youth Corps, and Career Opportunity Programs provide us with additional historical evidence. Now is the time to analyze this existing body of information, experience, success, and failure.

Finally, a number of articles in the literature describe programs that have increased students' motivation and ability to read and write. (Harshburger, 1972; Egerton, 1973; MacDonald, 1972; Dubois, 1969; Klasser, 1972; Turning, 1972; Glen, 1964; Bucklin and Bucklin, 1971; Bingen, 1973; Price, 1966; Beringhause, 1965; Miller, 1973; Phillips, 1972; Perry, 1969.)

The panel is by no means saying that enough evidence exists or that researchers have systematically collected or investigated enough. We believe that much more evidence on the academic performance of the new students as writers and readers and scholars in specific courses and contexts is necessary for us to assess more objectively the educability and potential of the new college students. Our recommendations in the program sections support this position.

Educators must also describe and analyze the external causes of failures. For us to assess how the new students' initial lack of basic skills inhibits their ability to succeed, it is essential that any "dropout" rate or other cause of failure be related not only to entering characteristics, but also to personal and social characteristics such as financial pressure, personal crises, transfers to other schools and/or jobs, and the quality of instruction. We can no longer assume that lack of basic skills is the only or primary cause for new-student failures.

In carrying out its charge to develop a research and development agenda to improve the reading and writing proficiency of high school graduates, the panel has found itself moving in certain directions. While our main focus was on the needs of the new students, we found that the programs we recommended would be of benefit to all college students. We have also had difficulty in confining our discussions and proposals to reading problems alone, when the skill of writing is so closely linked to reading and the two skills together represent the total use of written language. Fragmentation of these two skills in the minds of teachers and in the structures of departments is lamentable and wasteful. This panel, itself made up of both writing and reading teachers, believes strongly that the resources of both areas would be enriched by an alliance, and not merely a truce.

In the same spirit, the panel has stressed the importance of collaborative studies and methods to enable experts from such areas as psychology and linguistics to work with skills teachers on the learning problems of common concern to them. In addition, we encourage and endorse the integration of skills instruction with content courses, an effort requiring the collaboration of content teachers and skills teachers at every step.

Finally, because of the pressing needs for certain kinds of information about the new students, we have chosen to focus some of our research proposals on questions that would yield what might be called short term, practical results. Yet, some of the questions we raise depend upon research techniques and modes of analysis that lie more in the area of basic research. For this reason, we hope that the worlds of practitioners and researchers will merge more frequently and under conditions that encourage exchange.

The programs of research which we recommend in this report are
organized into the following four approaches:

Approach 7.1--Studies of Students
Approach 7.2--Testing and Diagnosis
Approach 7.3--Intervention Programs
Approach 7.4--Explorations of New Instructional Strategies

APPROACH 7.1

STUDIES OF STUDENTS

Approach Rationale

College freshmen are not simply people enrolled in some courses but students living in an academic world, a world which sets many tasks for its members beyond those teachers articulate in the classroom. Faced with many new administrative responsibilities (budgeting time, energy, and money), a variety of strange traditions and procedures, and an organizational structure that bewilders even experienced academics, freshmen are much like visitors in a foreign country or, at the least, apprentices in a new job.

Generally, new students are not properly students when they arrive at college; they have neither formed study habits nor experienced the rewards of studying. Many such students lack models for "studenthood." Often they are the first of their families and friends to attend college. Furthermore, having observed teachers only after the teachers have mastered their materials, they often have no sense of what studying entails. In particular, they lack criteria for thoroughness, for knowing when they have gone far enough or deep enough into a subject or assignment; they have difficulty assessing the amount of energy or time they need to carry out an assignment or how to make use of the resources on the campus (not only such obvious resources as libraries, but also such resources as their peers and informal discussions with other teachers). Often their queries about the number of pages to write, the number of examples to include, the importance of certain items on tests, and so on, appear to be cynical negotiations to avoid work when, in reality, they are trying to have teachers specify the work expected of them.

Many students are often reluctant to commit their energies to schoolwork. One can only conjecture why this reluctance occurs; we understand little about the dilemmas academia poses for students accustomed, if not to failure, at least to anonymity and passivity in academic situations. We can, however, assume that much of the incentive to work comes from being in an environment conducive to work. For the college, this environment means not simply improving conditions within the classroom, but determining ways in which an institution as a whole can encourage or discourage the urge to learn.

Central to this understanding is a more detailed, probing study of the students themselves--their strengths as well as their academic deficiencies, their attitudes toward their academic environment in its many aspects, and the patterns of success as well as failure that

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they have already experienced in academic programs. The results of
such studies have great policy implications. We should be able to
determine accurately how open enrollment has been received and how it
has or has not worked with students.

The panel is persuaded that inadequately explored assumptions
have shaped much of the research and many of the programs affecting
the new population of students. These assumptions include but are
not limited to the following:

1. That the new students, because of their skill deficiencies
   in reading and writing, are not capable of making up for
   lost time so that they can manage the academic work required
   of them;

2. That the motivations and aspirations the new students hold
   concerning a college education are different from those of
   traditional college students, and that these differences
   are incompatible with academic learning;

3. That these students, despite their skill deficiencies,
   bring to the classroom a world of experience and highly
   developed cognitive, nonschool skills which, if properly
   directed, can enable them to make up for lost time and
   achieve academic success.

Although the panel tends to support the third assumption and re-
ject the first two, there is insufficient information to support any
of these widely held assumptions. Knowledge about these new students
is fragmentary. We need to know the conditions that make success in
college possible--remedial reading programs, counseling opportunities
and experiences, special provisions of content courses and so forth.
We are not interested in yes or no answers; we are seeking to under-
stand those conditions that lead to student success in spite of
initial handicaps and that enable students to overcome their reading
and writing handicaps.

Most research on the new students and the instructional programs
serving them is limited largely to studies of across-the-board attri-
tion rates that do not account for the variables that may <u>cause</u>
attrition: Job demands, family responsibility, leaves of absence,
and so on. We now need to conduct systematic studies of students
in those "11th hour" programs that are apparently successful in
teaching basic language skills to young adult populations.

With the advent of open admissions, there are even larger numbers
of students entering college with reading difficulties severe enough
to prevent them from doing their college work well. No one knows what
the exact numbers are. Indeed, these estimates tend to vary according
to the minimal criteria used by the college or by an individual making
the estimate. According to one English professor at a southern

women's college with a recent open enrollment policy, about 50 percent of the students have significant reading problems, and a few read below the sixth-grade level. In that same college, most of the faculty estimates that about 20 percent of the students have difficulty with the reading in their courses (Cummings and Cummings, 1974).

In pursuing this kind of information, more researchers will doubtless use the case study approach. Before we spend large sums of money on projects of an interventionist or descriptive nature, we can use the case study approach to point the way to an exploration of both the reading and writing skills of the new college freshman and the reading and writing demands which college makes. Some of the areas that appear to merit consideration as critical points for case studies in reading and writing are the following:

1. Students with high, average, or low prediction of reading success.

2. Critical locations within freshman curriculums where there is a high prediction of failure--(e.g., biology, physics), and where reading is a suspected contributing variable.

3. Commuters and noncommuters to higher learning settings.

4. Students with unusual background experiences, i.e., vocational experience, specialized concept backgrounds.

5. Students with unusual high school backgrounds.

6. Students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

It is extremely important not to box ourselves into one methodological approach. Because this area is relatively new and unexplored, larger studies also deserve consideration. One type of study might be a survey of the characteristics of the new students at school, system, and regional levels.

"Studenthood" is a very broad and important concept. For the individuals involved, the concept of studenthood entails allowing themselves to be in a position of possibly failing, knowing that they have tried. It also means allowing themselves to identify with a community, a set of skills, and an image that often veers sharply from that to which they are accustomed. It means dealing with prejudices and preconceptions, often in a fairly nonsupportive environment, and dealing with their "old" image at home with family and long-standing friends. The implications of accepting the role of student and succeeding at it are far-reaching in their effect on students' personal lives and goals, family ties, and future interests. For many students, the process of integrating the emerging image and new skills with past ties is a major obstacle to the smooth transition to studenthood that living in a college environment now demands.

In addition, many students lack self-evaluative skills as well as confidence in what skills they do possess. On one level, how do they know they have the main idea, that they have understood the intent of the question? How can they check themselves? Why put themselves on the line in the struggle for achieving studenthood when they are not really sure they are capable of learning anything? With new skills and an emerging consciousness of the power of these literacy skills, many students continue to lack confidence in their abilities to evaluate the skills they are acquiring, or are still lacking.

The following programs should shed considerable light on the problems of the ill-prepared high school graduate. These problems are realities in most institutions of higher learning. It is now time to investigate the many aspects of this problem heretofore unstudied, and, in some cases, ignored.

Program 7.1.1:

Conduct surveys (at the regional, system, or school level) to determine the characteristics of new students entering college.

Program 7.1.2:

Conduct exploratory studies on both the nature of the experiences new students bring to the academic setting and the extent to which these students have engaged in the kind of thinking required in academic work.

Program 7.1.3:

Determine the strengths new students bring to the academic setting: Greater motivation stemming from the decision to return to school; positive attributes of experience related to family and employment responsibility; motivation stemming from a "second chance" situation; maturity which enables them to set their own goals and be in touch with their own learning styles.

Program 7.1.4:

Conduct case studies of individual students who have successfully completed college programs after entering college with deficient basic skills. What characteristics of these students apparently determined their success? What strategies and conditions facilitated their transition to studenthood?

Program 7.1.5:

Study the impact of pragmatic academic counseling upon the adjustment of freshmen to college work.

Program 7.1.6:

Analyze the tasks of being a student, identifying in particular the kinds of skills and awareness we assume students have when they enter college.

Program 7.1.7:

Study student perceptions of success in academic settings to determine the conflict students see and experience in integrating personal life and growth with academic life and growth. Determine strategies underprepared freshmen use successfully to cope with conflicts.

Program 7.1.8:

Study the effect of variables such as teacher attitude, peer group representation and support, perceptiveness, and accuracy of students' self-diagnosis upon the will to read and write.

Program 7.1.9:

Study student attitudes toward written language and reading.

Program 7.1.10:

Study the relationship between students' self-concepts and attitudes toward reading and writing.

Program 7.1.11:

Study the relationship between student achievement and learning style.

APPROACH 7.2

TESTING AND DIAGNOSIS

Approach Rationale

There is a very serious need for a closer study of the testing of
reading and reading-related skills in colleges and universities. At
first sight, it appears to be crucially important only in those col-
leges with large numbers of new students (and indeed this is our primary
focus), but it is of great importance to all colleges--even to those
with a more select student population. Many of the older, more estab-
lished colleges carried out some of the pioneering work in testing
and remediation. For example, Harvard College routinely tests incoming
freshmen on a special reading test, based on reading a typical college
assignment, a chapter from a textbook in the social sciences. Accord-
ing to William Perry, author of the test, it is highly predictive of
grade averages. The major purpose of this test is to identify for
further help those freshmen lacking the more refined and advanced
reading skills of knowing what to read and what not to read, how fast
or slowly to read it, and what to report.

A survey of reading programs at Black colleges and universities,
by Karen Thompson, an intern in the NIE Essential Skills program, con-
tains useful information about the kinds of reading programs, the
materials they use, the criteria for selecting students, and the tests
for placing students in their reading programs. However, because this
report was only preliminary, it did not include evidence of the
effectiveness of the methods and materials, the ability of the read-
ing tests to find the students needing help, the ability of the tests
to find the specific strengths and weaknesses of each student, and
the sensitivity of the test to measure progress. (All of these issues
will be covered in this Approach Rationale and in the programs that
follow.)

It may very well be that other colleges and postsecondary schools
have developed their own reading tests for their own needs, and that
these tests may be useful for other schools. A survey of the kinds
of reading tests postsecondary institutions use would discover the
types and benefits of such diagnostic instruments.

In approaching this problem of testing and diagnosis, we must
consider the purposes of reading tests in colleges. It appears that
one major purpose of a good testing program is to provide data neces-
sary for policy decisions about students and more specific decisions
regarding instruction and remediation. Thus, tests must first show
whether or not students have acquired the general reading skills

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sufficiently to be able to do their course work without special inter-
vention. However, a major stumbling block is in operation: Poorly
constructed and poorly analyzed tests.

For a variety of reasons no adequate diagnostic tests now exist.
Many of the tests were originally written and normed for children.
They do not allow for the conceptual and specialized vocabulary growth
of adults. Many adults have not learned the basic strategies needed
in taking conventional standardized tests (such as multiple choice
tests), and these inadequate test taking strategies produce invalid
estimates of their reading comprehension abilities.

Tests written to evaluate reading comprehension skills often do
not allow for diagnosis of the more basic skills necessary for answer-
ing a question, so that even when students get an answer wrong, there
is still a lack of information about what the real problem is. Often,
students who are accustomed to seeing themselves as lacking in read-
ing skills won't even attempt to answer a question which appears, on
the surface, to be too difficult, even though in reality it is within
their ability. In designing diagnostic tests for underprepared
freshmen, the first step has to be a study of why what we have is not
suitable. We then need to develop a design that will fill the needs
of the students (who often want a realistic appraisal of their
strengths and weaknesses), the teachers (to feed into course design
and teaching methods and techniques), and the institution (for data
to help plan supportive programs for the students).

A concurrent problem is the lack of knowledge about reading
and writing necessary for college work, and, more specifically, for
a particular course of study at college. Students' skills may be
more than adequate for a course of study in retail sales, but not
for a course of study in engineering.

The question of sufficient reading and writing skills to cope
with academic assignments is relevant to all colleges. The question
of identifying diagnostic tests to provide this kind of information
is crucial. To date, the tests most widely used have been stan-
dardized achievement tests like the Nelson-Denny Test and the Iowa
Silent Reading Test. These are basically survey tests, although they
afford some comparisons of different aspects of reading. Thus the
Nelson-Denny can give separate estimates of word meaning, reading
comprehension, and reading rate. However, all the subtests are timed,
so rate is probably a factor in all three measures. The same is true
of the Iowa Test.

Both of these tests are norm-referenced, in that the measures
are basically comparisons of students taking the tests, rather than
descriptions of masteries of particular skills. As with most exist-
ing norm-referenced tests, the raw scores translate into grade-level
equivalents or percentiles. These tests have received considerable
criticism through the years, primarily because the results can easily

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be misinterpreted unless used with understanding and sensitivity. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of personnel qualified to work with new students, qualified in the sense that they possess proper theoretical training and actual experience in teaching young adults to read.

'The grade-level equivalents of standardized subtests are particularly problematic when used with college students. What does it mean when college freshmen test at the 8th-grade level on reading comprehension? A valid answer might be that they have mastered some of the fundamental skills of reading at about the level of average 8th graders. But what does this mean for college-level work? We do not know too much, but it is fairly accurate to predict that without a careful assessment of specific strengths and weaknesses and subsequent remediation, the students' staying power in most academic course work will be very short. (We can also validate this statement by examining differential dropout rates.) Eighth-grade reading level is usually insufficient for "typical" college level work.

In short there is little information to assist in the diagnosis of reading and writing deficiencies (and/or strengths) of new students. There is a concommitant lack of instruments that assess attitudes and proficiencies in specific content areas. For example, new findings in the area of self-concept indicate that although there is a global self-concept that may be reasonably stable, within the same self-concept profile there can be great variability in self-concept when applied to specific subject areas that depend substantially on high level reading and writing skills, e.g., biology, psychology, history. At the present time, there is a need for instruments to assess self-concept in areas other than reading and writing. Further, there is some evidence suggesting that different disciplines present some unique reading demands. Students may be able to read in an introductory political science textbook successfully, yet be unable to handle the reading demands of an introductory biology course. The evidence raises two issues: Readability and introductory knowledge. We discuss readability here, and introductory knowledge in Approach 7.3.

One hypothesis we suggest is that the difficulty in biology as opposed to political science may be due to the variance in logic, writing style, unfamiliar vocabulary, or concept load contained in biology texts, contrasted with the more familiar demands contained in the political science tests. We do not know much about reading variance among content areas, the effect it has on students, the accommodations that teachers make to assist students with apparent problems, or reasons why some students are indeed having difficulty with the course.

We speculate here that the "teachability" of a text may be a more useful concept than its readability. Traditional measures of readability are based on vocabulary and sentence length. Such measures, however, may not be accurate ways of assessing the

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usefulness of a text for teaching a new area. The concept of teachability, as we use it, gives consideration to the relationship between the text and the course content, the content of the field, and the teaching style of the instructor. Such an approach links questions of design or choice of appropriate texts with broader issues of curriculum design.

Development of new diagnostic tests will be an important addition to any institution working with open admissions and/or underprepared students. They can use the new tests in deciding on the need for special help or the adjustment of reading and writing assignments. They can also prove extremely beneficial to the remedial teaching process by providing clues as to what textbooks and other materials students can handle and understand in terms of the readability level, the linguistic complexity, the level of sophistication of ideas, abstractions, and so on.

As a result of a survey of reading and writing tests in colleges and universities, the field should be able to determine with more accuracy the following: How a representative group of colleges and universities now use reading, reading-related (e.g. spelling), and writing tests; how often they use such tests; why they use specific tests; how they employ results; if they give retests and, if so, why; and what sorts of new tests present test users need. We could certainly use the results of this survey to develop new assessment and diagnostic instruments.

Program 7.2.1:

Survey reading, spelling, and writing tests currently in use in colleges and universities, with special emphasis on tests for open admissions students.

Program 7.2.2:

Develop diagnostic tests that accurately assess the reading and writing strengths and weaknesses of freshmen in open admissions programs.

Program 7.2.3:

Develop tests that assess student attitudes toward reading and writing in general, and content courses specifically.

Program 7.2.4:

Analyze whether the current practice of using standardized reading tests for identifying students needing help in reading and writing is effective.

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Program 7.2.5:

Determine what procedures we can use to identify deficient
students before they reach college age. Are test scores from high
school useful here?

Program 7.2.6:

Analyze academic languages in textbooks in order to identify the
distinctive problems specific content areas pose.

Program 7.2.7:

Develop for college texts readability criteria that are sensi-
tive to the skills and learning styles of new students. Implement
the concept of teachability of a text.

APPROACH 7.3,

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Approach Rationale

Although the problem of inadequate reading comprehension among
students at the college level seems to be a new one, coming with the
advent of the recent open enrollment programs in urban and community
colleges, it is actually not new. Indeed it would appear that Black
colleges have faced this problem from the start, and, indeed, still
face it (Blake, 1971). Thus, Blake notes that the Black colleges
were a major force in the development of literacy programs for Black
people. "For example, from 1855 to 1930 a totally illiterate people
advanced to slightly over 80 percent literacy. Between 1890 and
1930 Black literacy increased 93.8 percent compared to 32 percent for
the southern region as a whole." However, even by 1968, of those
who entered Black colleges as freshmen, only 35 to 40 percent gradu-
ated, as compared to 50 to 55 percent nationally. Regarding the
background of students in Black colleges, Blake notes:

> Looking at the entering freshmen, one wonders if
> any other college could do as well. In a sample
> of fourteen colleges, public and private, the median
> income was $3,900 and from a third to half of the
> mothers and fathers were domestics and laborers with
> less than a high school education. Their freshman
> test performance was about one standard deviation
> below the norms for the nation, except for a non-
> verbal test on which they scored slightly above
> average.

In a real sense, only the magnitude of the problem is new; as we
noted above, Black colleges, as well as State universities, and non-
traditional, private institutions have for some time been dealing
with a considerable percentage of students deficient in the communi-
cation skills of reading and writing necessary for successful college
work. The previous practice of expecting the student to meet the
reading skill requirements of the various academic courses resulted
in a sizable attrition rate among freshmen and sophomores, especially
among the low achieving or underprepared high school students. Today,
with the building of institutional responsibility and accountability,
the universities are reexamining their policies toward the academi-
cally underprepared. More colleges and universities are beginning
to accept some responsibility for the language deficiencies students
bring to postsecondary education and provide mechanisms to alleviate
and reduce these deficiencies. To date, however, studies on "program

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effectiveness" have been very limited. Rarely have the results been disseminated on a wide scale. It seems that each institution is struggling alone; only when one professor has personal contacts at another institution are programs shared.

The following dimensions characterize evaluations of intervention programs:

1. There has been an increase of studies conducted in conjunction with college programs. Generally, the studies suffer from poor research methods and have not been replicated to produce generalizable results. Most research studies have evaluated programs or aspects of programs within or specific to particular institutions.

2. The most common type of evaluation method is the use of a simple two-group design with a t test to analyze pre- and post-test scores and differences in mean GPA using crude gains.

3. Few studies concentrate on the effectiveness of specific teaching methods appropriate to the college-age student.

The panel recommends research to describe intervention programs so that others can benefit from the results. These descriptions should include individual programs initiated by individual teachers; programs outside the traditional academic setting; programs initiated by an outside agency(ies) or agent(s) and placed in specific postsecondary settings; programs initiated and developed by the institution and selectively implemented; programs initiated by the institution and implemented for all students; programs developed under the GI Bill of Rights; and programs designed specifically for open admissions students. These descriptions should include positive as well as negative results and should show how the institutions have worked with their faculty to develop and implement these intervention programs.

We further recommend that descriptions, and in some instances surveys, of these programs be more than mere tabulations of tests, methods, and materials. What we need at this stage of "trial and error" is some insight into the pedagogical barriers impeding progress in this area.

Field consultants Robert and Deborah Cummings advise study of the institutional and professional restraints that exist between the "skills"-oriented faculty (e.g., reading improvement teachers), and the "content"-oriented faculty (e.g., history, literature). "Often," they write, "the two breeds seem not to mix." Specifically, there is no common agreement about whether all students who do not score well on diagnostic tests should undergo a substantial number of "skills" courses before they begin much "content" work, or whether "skills" study should be a kind of first aid for those students who

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fall behind in "content" courses. In addition, there are "bad connotations to the idea of studying reading directly; it seems to have an aura of 'remedial' rather than 'real' college work." (Cummings and Cummings, 1974)

In some areas where there is a high prediction of student failure, some programs are running counter to expected failure outcomes. Some students are having a successful higher education experience. For example, in some open enrollment programs located in urban areas where there is often a high dropout rate, assistance in reading appears to aid students' retention. We need to gather data on programs that reflect various divergences in location, purpose, educational philosophies, and educational settings (i.e., universities without walls, open enrollment institutions, professional schools). An equally important and related question we need to investigate concerns training the faculty to understand the needs of these students. We should also investigate the integration of skills and content course instruction. Is it advantageous for skill and content course instructors to meet together to plan curriculums? On most campuses, skill instruction is not a "high status" position. The promotion system allows senior faculty to avoid skills courses, leaving the work to their juniors. It is important to note that very few "content" professors are knowledgeable about or have received training in the teaching of reading and writing. The institutional rewards for good teaching in the skills area are difficult to reap. We need to identify the successful attempts to overcome such barriers. For example, students may be able to overcome reading problems in freshmen biology if the university provides a resident reading specialist to team with the professor teaching the course. Through careful selection and control, educators could assess the effects of this type of intervention.

Another important avenue of investigation is the traditional concept of "introductory courses." It is safe to say that an introductory course in a new subject may pose serious problems for new students. Students, more often than not, bring little experience to this new discipline, so that the task facing the teacher is often insurmountable. Most introductory courses have large enrollments; most introduce a brand new vocabulary and are a very frustrating experience for the students with limited reading and writing proficiency. Many teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the problems now facing them, and are so "discipline"-oriented that they all too quickly write the students off and never provide the help and guidance they need. Educators need to conduct research to determine if introductory courses, as presently constituted, are positive and productive ways to teach new concepts. Do they help bridge the gap between "no knowledge" and "enough knowledge" to continue in a particular field? How can reading specialists and content teachers work together in such courses so that they are not at cross purposes, but are helping to alleviate many of their students' reading and writing problems? We have yet to experience all the possible approaches to the reading

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and writing problems the open admissions policy presents. We need to investigate and describe intervention programs, where skills and content teachers work together. We must explore a variety of methods, e.g., successful tack-on programs that teach only reading and writing; programs that teach reading and writing in the context of content courses; programs that have brought about changes in students' reading and writing abilities without institutional commitment; and programs that have adapted themselves to changes mandated by the institution.

Research on program intervention will be an important contribution to those individuals working with open admissions students. Much research is now going on under the direction of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, and there should be close communication between NIE and the Fund. One should not lose sight of the fact that the results of demonstration programs, both positive and negative, can advance the field. The time has come for careful analysis and description of intervention programs--those currently in existence and those waiting to be developed and tested.

Program 7.3.1:

Conduct descriptive and analytic case studies of reading and writing intervention programs with the following characteristics:

1. Individual programs initiated by individual teachers;

2. Programs implemented outside the traditional academic, institutional setting;

3. Programs initiated and developed by the entire institution;

4. Programs initiated by the institution and selectively implemented.

Program 7.3.2:

Describe present ideas of what constitutes introductory knowledge in specific disciplines and assess the validity of these ideas in the light of learning theories and task analyses of what students must ultimately be able to do in a specific discipline.

Program 7.3.3:

Develop evaluation guides and models for individual teachers to use when they evaluate intervention programs.

Program 7.3.4:

Study the effectiveness of various team arrangements in teaching reading and writing: Content teacher-skills teacher; counselor-teacher; skills teacher-psychologist.

nie conference on studies in reading

APPROACH 7.4

EXPLORATION OF NEW INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Approach Rationale

Experience thus far with the new students suggests the fruitfulness of some instructional approaches and the inadequacy of others. What we need now is a clearer sense of the pedagogical directions in which these successful experiences point and an understanding of ways to encourage institutional commitment to the new approaches. Using the current wisdom about the needs of new students, we can suggest several promising innovations worth investigating. We would also point out that many of the changes that seem worthwhile are going to appear to be major ones and may encounter institutional resistance. We should not blithely investigate such innovations without preparing for this resistance.

Two models for reading and writing instruction currently dominate the field: Separate skills training (the remedial model) and the integrated skills-content curriculum. In the former, students with problems are given separate remedial training in reading and writing. One criticism of such a model is that remedial classes, including the teachers and students, are generally looked down on in a college setting; such negative connotations reduce the potential for learning. In the second model, students receive skills training along with their regular coursework and learn skills in the context of regular course content. One problem with this model is that teachers who teach regular content courses usually do not have the skills or the inclination to help learners whose problems are not content-specific. Elsewhere, we have suggested collaboration between remedial skills teachers and regular content teachers in an attempt to facilitate the implementation of the second model. Here we suggest looking again at the two models and determining whether in fact we have to choose between them. It is certainly possible that one model is better for some tasks, and the other model is more suited to another set of learning tasks. For example, students may learn spelling better in the separate skills model, while they may learn composition better with the integrated skills-content approach. We could then design and test the operation of programs using each of these models where they are most appropriate.

Beyond the development of innovative programs which take advantage of the best aspects of both of the reading instruction models, we are also interested in innovations in two areas--the imaginative use of writing and speaking skills and the use of television to teach content areas and reading.

It seems worthwhile to use students' whole communications abilities, using strengths in some areas to improve weaker areas. It is unlikely that new students arrive at college with equal writing, reading, and speaking abilities. Through intensive testing in each of the three areas, we can assemble profiles to describe differing abilities of the new students. From these data, we could establish those strengths that we could use to deal with the students' weaknesses. For example, if a student demonstrated strong oral abilities in communicating about a particular concept, assigning the same concept area in reading might lead to more effective reading skills development.

Students might profitably use writing skills, and possibly improve them, in certain college subjects which are traditionally nonwriting subjects, e.g., psychology and biology. In such subjects, students typically convey to the teacher their understanding of the subject matter through "objective" tests, e.g., multiple choice or true-false. The absence of writing in these courses, however, may be unfortunate. There is some evidence that writing helps people organize and evaluate their thoughts; it seems to require people to take an "active" attitude toward the subject matter. In this way writing becomes a learning tool as well as a method of giving teachers a kind of information different from that which objective tests provide. We would, however, add a cautionary note. If the new students do not receive help with their writing, this use of writing in place of objective tests may put these students at an even greater disadvantage. Programs attempting to use writing as a learning tool should be sensitive to this problem.

Although much educational work with television has tended to lead students away from reading, the possibility remains that this medium could teach both specific course content and reading skills in general. Television can convey a variety of sophisticated concepts—witness the recent Kenneth Clark series Civilization and the series The Ascent of Man by Jacob Bronowski. A creative linking of such visual and oral transmissions of knowledge with reading might encourage students to search for the same kinds of ideas when they – face only a text.

There may be an added advantage here if teachers themselves are able to design their own programs. In the course of translating the subject into the unfamiliar medium, teachers will have to refine their thinking and analyze the learning task in ways they may not have done before. The goal here is an alliance of teacher and technology to teach effectively both subject matter and reading skills.

We should not neglect the teachers themselves when we consider new strategies. They are the ones whose skills are crucial in implementing the new instructional approaches. Traditionally, college teachers have not received any teacher training per se; their training has focused on the development of expertise in a discipline.

Given the needs of the new students, this training is inadequate. Teachers now need to know how to convey information effectively, how to tailor material to the needs of students, how to diagnose problems, and how to help those students who are having problems.

As research suggested in this report produces an understanding of appropriate ways to meet the needs of the new students, we should put this knowledge into practice. We emphasize here the development of inservice teacher training to accomplish this goal, rather than training of new teachers. The market for teachers, particularly in the area of language arts and communication, is projected to be relatively low over the next 10 years. If institutions are to meet the demands of new students during this time, there will be a heavy demand placed upon inservice training programs. Some people may question the feasibility of such an approach to change, but the experiences of such programs as the Thirteen College Curriculum Program (which has undertaken the inservice training of a large number of teachers in different classroom techniques and the creation of curriculum) strongly indicates that such an approach can be effective in redirecting faculty energies.

Given our present understanding of some of the needs of the new students, we suggest that one focus of such training programs be on broadening the linguistic sensitivities of teachers. The new students enter college with a variety of speaking and writing styles. The preparation of most English teachers has focused on the great literature, and their idea of language style is defined by that literature. Similarly, teachers in other disciplines are accustomed to the writing style typically used in the research reports of that discipline. It might help to expose teachers to the broader phenomenon of language: The nature of language as an oral symbolic system, the nature of dialects, the history of English and how it continually changes in vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation, and current thinking on reading, writing, and comprehension skills. This knowledge will help teachers both deal with the problems their students face and develop more positive attitudes toward the language styles of their students.

Lastly, we should give serious consideration to the institution as a whole and to ways of facilitating change within it. It should be apparent that responding appropriately to the needs of the new students on campus requires major changes in the institutions themselves, including new content, sequencing and structuring of courses, training of instructors, and augmented support services. There is often a tendency for institutions to resist such changes. However, in some colleges new practices are evident: All English department faculty members, rather than just the most junior members, must teach skills courses; class size is reasonably small, so that students have a better chance to participate and receive individual help; supplementary counseling services are available; substantial resources support skills instruction. In such colleges, the new students have had a major impact on the institution as a whole. What

are the elements that went into accomplishing these changes? Where
did support come from? Who made the budgetary decisions? What role
did the faculty play? How have the attitudes of the administration
changed as a result of these new policies? Have hiring practices
changed, and if so, how? Case studies of those institutions which
did change may give valuable insight into the process by which an
institution successfully reorganizes itself to accommodate the new
students.

Program 7.4.1:

Study the relative merits of the two main models for reading
instruction that now dominate the field: The separate skills train-
ing (remedial model) and the integrated skills-content curriculum.

Program 7.4.2:

Explore ways of using television to strengthen the desire and
ability of students to read.

Program 7.4.3:

Explore the introduction of writing as a learning tool in
traditionally nonwriting courses.

Program 7.4.4:

Study the interrelationships of writing, reading, and speaking to
discover how the strengths in one area of communication can assist
weaknesses in another area.

Program 7.4.5:

Design and implement demonstration projects for teachers with
special emphasis on inservice training.

Program 7.4.6:

Study the ways in which the linguistic sensitivities of teachers
may be improved. Assess the effect of this improvement on the
language abilities of the "new" students in their classes.

Program 7.4.7:

Conduct descriptive and analytic case studies of colleges which have taken the lead in attempting to meet the needs of the new students.

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