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ABSTRACT

Reading teachers should be flexible enough to adapt to varying situations that they encounter when they are asked to develop school-wide reading programs. Under ideal conditions, the faculty and administration are enthusiastic volunteers who accomplish the bulk of the reading program's objectives in their classrooms, allowing the reading specialist to serve as a general advisor and resource person and to focus on students with specific reading problems. When faculty are less than enthusiastic and supportive, yet available for limited duties, the reading teacher creates a reading program that parallels content-area coursework and uses content-area instructors as advisors and resource persons. When no faculty enthusiasm or support for a reading program exists, the reading teacher shares responsibility for program content with the students, using thematic units, learning centers with relaxed environments, self-paced individual activities, and small group activities that allow the reading teacher enough free time to work with students who need special attention. (RL)

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EVERYBODY INTO THE POOL!

OR

STARTING A SCHOOL-WIDE READING PROGRAM

Introduction

Whence the reading program. "What's the matter with these kids? They've been going to school for years and they still can't read!!" The lamentation rings throughout the land. Newspapers report on the low scores of the district's students on the standardized reading tests and editorialize about the lack of decent education. Teachers throw up their hands in disgust, overtly blaming "the system," the bureaucrats who run the schools and the socio-economic conditions under which the students are being raised, and covertly blaming "them," the students who are "stupid," "unappreciative" and "unworthy" of the teachers' efforts. Red-faced administrators face the press and the parents, mutter something about "hasty misinterpretation" of test scores and then go back and blame the teachers. Out of all the fault-finding and buck-passing comes "the solution": start a reading program in the schools. The word gets out: if you can't get a job teaching English, take a few reading courses and you've got it made. Suddenly everyone's a "reading specialist," including this writer. Now what?

Cynicism aside, the fact is that students do need reading instruction, whether it be developmental or corrective, as part of their regular classroom work. What happens all too often, however, is that a large group of students is thrown together in a reading class, not in an effort to meet their individual or even collective needs, but to meet the needs of the daily schedule. There is frequently no effort made to organize a school-wide reading program, only an effort to have something tangible to show parents and administrators, a "reading class," "reading lab," "reading clinic" or other well-intended though meaningless euphemism for a room in which to place the students under adult supervision for a set amount of time each day. In the end, success of the reading program, however it may be accomplished, reflects on the "enlightened" school officials; failure reflects on the reading teacher.

Purpose of article. There is a need to find an approach to reading instruction that goes beyond "dictionary work" or even beyond a competent program of reading skills instruction. Even in a very good reading program run by a qualified specialist, students are too often taught how to succeed in reading class only. The skills they learn in reading class never leave that room, and the students remain lost and confused in handling printed materials in their other subjects. This article, then, will explore the possibilities of organizing a school-wide reading program, one which has the support and cooperation

of the administration and faculty, and even one in which support and cooperation are lacking.

The Ideal Situation

Requirements. The ideal reading program, as outlined by Massey and Moore (1965), Steed and Katrein (1970), Rauch (1974), Burmeister (1974) and others, is predicated on full cooperation among the reading specialist, the administration and the classroom or content area teachers. Massey and Moore, for instance, list eight "minimum requirements" for establishing and organizing an effective reading program. Some of these requirements simply reflect good classroom practices, such as providing for growth in reading skills through an organized, sequential program of skill-building activities. Other requirements are, however, beyond the scope of the classroom teacher alone and call for positive interaction with the faculty and administration. For example, one requirement is that the reading program "permeates the whole school and is heartily endorsed by the entire faculty." This is a tall order and is not always, or even often, the case. Rauch, speaking of the role of school administrators, lists as the first "characteristic" of a good reading program the concept that it "must have full administrative support...not only in theory but in providing practical, concrete application of their beliefs...in terms of classroom

equipment and materials, in-service education and encouragement to experiment."

Example of such a program. Given a situation of cooperation and participation by an entire school, as outlined above, it is not too difficult to find an example of a successful reading program. Reidelberger (1972) speaks of a reading program in a San Carlos, California high school where the faculty worked hand-in-hand with the reading specialist to create, organize and operate a highly effective school-wide reading program. The program received its initial boost from the participation of the reading specialist, a reading aide and the principal in a workshop which emphasized team efforts across departmental lines. Following their experience, the three returned to their school and began to organize a reading program there. A problem-solving committee was formed to look into the extent of the reading problems of students at the school and at the experiences and abilities of the faculty to deal with the problems. The program, the organizing committee decided, would have to have full participation of the entire faculty in order to be totally effective. Each teacher was committed to "giving up ten consecutive planning periods to teach reading." In addition, it was decided that the program was to "receive the major thrust for the year, taking precedence over any other in-service program." With the willingness of the entire staff to pitch in, the program was off to a running start. The teachers met for workshops designed to familiarize them with materials and methods useful in teaching reading. The reading specialist served as an advisor,

suggesting ways to recognize students with reading problems and presenting the general reading program for the year. To avoid problems that would be incurred by simply plunging blindly ahead, the teachers entered the program gradually by working at first in teams of two with a class of ten students. The next step was for the teachers to identify those students who should participate in the full-scale program. This was accomplished by a combination of an examination of the scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests and teacher recommendations based on observation. The students selected for the program were scheduled for nine weeks in the reading lab, taken in lieu of English class. Without going into all the details of the specific classroom procedures, it is sufficient to report that the program was deemed an unqualified success. This writer would make mention, however, of the lack of information as to whether the teaching practices used in the reading class were transferred to the content area classrooms, where they should have been adapted in the day-to-day program. Isolated projects such as the one described above tend to benefit a very few students for a very brief time before disappearing in the wake of some new experiment.

Another approach. However successful the San Carlos program may have been, it is apparent that the basis of its success was the hearty enthusiasm and support of the principal and faculty. Unfortunately, it is rare that a program gets such unqualified support. There is frequently a great deal of reluctance on the part of classroom and content

area teachers to get involved in any program outside the immediate scope of their particular expertise. Kennedy (1972) warns that the reading specialist should carefully avoid using such phrases as "every teacher, a teacher of reading" to elicit support for a school-wide reading program. The reading specialist, especially a newcomer to a school, who approaches the faculty with this attitude is likely to meet with resistance, if not outright belligerence. Most content area teachers are untrained in the teaching of reading and may feel threatened if they are asked to incorporate reading instruction into their programs. They may also see the demand on their time and effort as being in direct conflict with the amount of time they spend in teaching content. Indeed, it may take quite a bit of arguing to convince them there is a need for reading instruction in their classrooms at all. After all, that's the reading teacher's job, isn't it? Such teachers, then, are not likely to be charmed into teaching reading skills, or even adjusting their programs to meet the needs of the students' levels of reading abilities within their classrooms, by a reading specialist who shows them how or what to teach. There is a need, then, to convince the content teacher that there are methods and materials that would make the teaching of reading an integral part, rather than a separate function, of the content work.

A program designed to cope with the recalcitrance of the content area teachers is described by Landis, Jones and Kennedy (1973). The program, designed to meet the needs of learning disabled students at a Lincoln, Illinois school, used both content and reading skills

for instructional purposes. But instead of having the content area teachers give reading instruction, the program employed their specialized skills, without any threat to their egos or undue demands on their time. The content area teachers were asked to use their background and knowledge to prepare behavioral objectives and create non-reading learning materials to teach their subject matter. They were to avoid the content textbooks by designing activities making use of the auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities. In turn, the reading specialist designed a parallel reading program for the students, using the content of the English, mathematics and science programs. The dual system allowed the students to learn the content of their courses while, at the same time, receiving special instruction in word recognition, comprehension and study skills. This approach, said by the authors to be highly successful, seems to be one that reading specialists should consider in seeking the support of the content area teachers. Instead of presenting some dramatic plan to have the content teachers change their entire approach to teaching, the reading specialist is asking them for help in establishing the reading program. Instead of threatening their egos, the specialist is flattering them by acknowledging their expertise in their field and proposing a method which will allow them to combine their talents for the benefit of the students. There is not much point in teaching reading without content. A program like this provides both reading instruction and content.

The Far-From-Ideal Situation

The situation. If the ideal reading program demands the support and cooperation of the administration and faculty, reality demonstrates that there are times when such support is non-existant. Most reports on reading programs speak of situations where there are a minimum number of students and a maximum amount of individualization. Kennedy says it is "inconceivable" that any teacher could provide needed reading instruction when given a class of thirty-five students. Well, as "inconceivable" as this might be, it is a fact that many times it will be the case that the reading teacher is handed a roster of six classes of thirty-five students and is told to teach them reading. While the temptation might be to throw in the towel and haul out the battered dictionaries, there are ways to cope with a situation like this. After all, the best argument the reading teacher will have for expanding the scope of the reading program will be to demonstrate success under these less-than-ideal circumstances.

What to do. In approaching this Herculean task, it would be wise to consider the advice of Adams and Shuman (1973), who attack a number of myths about the "proper" way to teach reading and urge the reading teacher to "sin a little" and break some of the iconoclastic rules to establish an inviting atmosphere for learning. They scoff at such ideas as "every school should have a reading laboratory," ("The very sound of this suggests something pathological," they say.), and "the reading room should be kept quiet." ("Very few will read in hermetically sealed environments," they argue.) The gist of their

message is that if the teacher sets a relaxed atmosphere in which each student is allowed to take an active part in the implementation of the program, there is less likely to be the sort of problems which frequently accompany large classes of low-track students. They argue most convincingly for "imaginative leadership" on the part of the reading teacher and relative freedom for the students.

Freedom does not preclude responsibility, however, and there are ways to show the students they are to take responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of the program to their benefit and the teacher's satisfaction. Apart from keeping a tight rein on everything the students do, one suggestion (Pendrak, 1974) is to use a contingency or performance contract, outlining the work the student is responsible for and the criteria for grading. This not only places the responsibility on the students but also relieves them of the pressure of worrying about grades. They know precisely what is expected of them at all times and can set their own achievement goals, in competition with no one but themselves.

Another problem faced by the reading teacher, especially one who is without the help of the content area teachers, is to provide content for the reading course. In "real" reading situations, the students will never read isolated words or paragraphs, seeking the main idea or doing other exercises devoid of content. This is the major failing of relying on programmed kits for anything other than reinforcement of skills, for nowhere but in these kits will the

students be called upon to read a short passage, answer a few multiple choice questions and then go on to the next, totally unrelated paragraph. One method for avoiding this situation and creating content for the program is the use of the thematic unit. Dehnke (1972) describes such a thematic approach in which the students participate in a variety of reading, writing, listening and manipulative activities, all relating to a common theme. The reading instruction is an integral part of the activities, just as it should be in any content area. Once launched, students working on a thematic unit handle many of the materials independently, freeing the teacher to work with small groups or individuals on reading and study skills.

As an adjunct to the reading activities, Chance (1974) outlines a program using learning stations to teach or reinforce reading and study skills. A learning station or center is some corner of the classroom where a student or students work on an activity designed around one particular skill. The activity is clearly described at the center and the students work independently. While the use of such stations again frees the teacher to give individual attention where needed, no reading program can depend on them alone. However, by combining several approaches--whole group and small group activities, independent work, thematic units and learning centers--in an atmosphere of encouragement coupled with student responsibility, the reading teacher, even one with thirty-five students in a class, can provide for individual

needs. By having the students participate in such activities, the teacher is free to be used as a resource and a guide.

Conclusion

Ideally, a reading program should be organized with the full cooperation of the reading specialist, administration and faculty of a school, using the talents, abilities and expertise of all for the benefit of the students. Given such cooperation, there is little that cannot be accomplished in terms of reading growth. Reading becomes an integral part of every content course, and the reading specialist is both a reading teacher and a consultant and resource for the entire school. The principal, in turn, uses his or her position to see to it that the appropriate materials and facilities are made available in all content areas and encourages in-services programs and experimentation by the faculty. In the situation where there is not this total commitment, but where the administration and faculty are approachable, the reading specialist can approach the content area teachers seeking help, asking them to design objectives and materials in their subject areas that can be used successfully by students with reading difficulties. In this case, the reading specialist takes on the role of teaching reading skills, aided by content materials and the assurance that the students will not be frustrated by having to cope with textbooks that are beyond their ability to deal with effectively.

In the situation where the reading specialist receives little or no support, there are still a number of ways to fulfill the needs of

the students. The use of thematic units, learning centers, contingency contracts, individual and small group activities frees the reading teacher to work with those individuals who need special attention; for the bulk of the students, the teacher is a resource, a guide, not the sole authority for learning. In this way, the students not only learn the reading skills but learn to take responsibility for their own education.

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