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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the ranking by first-year teachers of how much support instructional practices in reading received by universities, administrators, colleagues, and parents. Subjects, 110 new teachers in Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico, completed the survey. Results indicated that administrators, colleagues, and parents encourage use of basal readers, workbooks, and writing activities while universities encourage language experience, writing activities, learning centers, and free, silent reading. Anecdotal data that 19 teachers submitted on the backs of their surveys reinforces the conclusion that a disparity existed between teachers' training programs and their schools' expectations in the area of reading instruction. The anecdotal data also revealed the full range of pleasure and pain associated with making the transition from student to professional in the field of education. (The entire text of the teachers' comments is included; the survey instrument is attached.) (RS)

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**A Survey of the Instructional Reading Practices
of New Teachers in Three States**

**Paper presented at the
International Reading Association Conference
May 7, 1991
Las Vegas, NV**

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A Survey of the Instructional Reading Practices of New Teachers in Three States

Marsha Grace, Ed.D.

IRA Conference, Las Vegas, NV, May 7, 1991

One hundred and ten new teachers in three states were surveyed in the spring of 1988 concerning their instructional practices in the area of reading. These new teachers in Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico were asked to rank the importance of ten instructional practices on the basis of how much encouragement each practice received by universities, administrators, colleagues, parents. A copy of the survey is attached. The ten instructional practices were:

Basal Readers

Language Experience

Computer Assisted Instruction

Round Robin Reading

Free, Silent Reading

Workbooks/Skillbooks

Writing Activities

Learning Centers

Children's Literature-Teacher Reads

Children's Literature-Instructional

The ranking of the survey items revealed that these new teachers had been encouraged by their universities to use different instructional strategies than those encouraged by their administrators, colleagues, and parents. Listed below are the top five instructional strategies recommended by each of the four groups (highlighting has been added to enhance like rankings).

University coursework encouraged	Administrators encourage	Co-teachers think it best to use	Parents seem to think it best to use
1) language experience	1) basal readers	1) basal readers	1) basal readers
2) writing activities	2) workbks/skill books	2) workbks/skill books	2) workbks/skill books
3) learning centers	3) writing activities	3) writing activities	3) writing activities
4) free, silent reading	4) language experience	4) language experience	4) children's lit-instructional
5) children's lit-instructional	5) children's lit-instructional	5) round-robin reading	5) language experience

In addition to the close ranking of instructional practices among administrators, colleagues, and parents, it is important to note that new teachers felt they were spending too much time on basals and workbooks and desired to spend more time on language experience and writing activities. When questioned about from whom they would seek support for making instructional changes in their classroom, these new teachers ranked their principal as their number one choice for support and fellow teachers as their number two choice. The two last choices on the list of eleven resources for support in changing their instructional strategies were a graduate course in reading and the school librarian.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Principal | 7) Reading consultant |
| 2) Fellow teachers | 8) School board |
| 3) Resource for new ideas | 9) Additional inservice |
| 4) Parents | 10) Graduate course in reading |
| 5) Additional materials | 11) Librarian |
| 6) Curriculum director | |

It was concluded that a disparity existed between these teachers' training programs and their schools' expectations in the area of reading instruction. It is recommended that universities do more to empower first-year teachers to implement their new training especially in view of the new teachers' tendencies to actually engage in the practices encouraged by their school environment rather than their teacher training program. Better communication and leadership between university programs and public school programs is also recommended. A more detailed presentation of the data can be found in an article entitled *Novice Teachers: Do They Use What we Teach Them?* in Reading Horizons, Winter, 1990, pages 25-34, by Daves, Morton, and Grace.

The focus of this current paper is to present the anecdotal data that 19 new teachers submitted on the backs of their surveys. The anecdotal data reveal there is an astute awareness among many of the new teachers that something is not quite right. They see disparities between the theoretical, teacher training they received and the real world of work. It could even be an appropriate guess that new teachers might be skeptical about the validity of their university training when they indicate they would need support from nine other educational entities including parents and school boards before they would turn to

support from a graduate course in reading. Their verbatim comments follow with the letters T, C, or NM representing the state in which they received certification, either Texas, Colorado, or New Mexico. The next letter, either T, C, NM, or A represents in which state they were teaching at the time of the survey, either Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, or Arizona. Although there is no statistical pattern between comments and states represented, this information is offered to those readers who might be interested in geographic trends.

- 1) Too much emphasis is put into teaching the basal. Any defiance of this rule results in being graded down in the evaluation system of grading teachers. T T
- 2) Changes are desperately needed for those students identified as poor readers. Rather than repeating the same approach, a new approach should be tried. Not much was said about motivating readers-a most important aspect of learning reading, especially for the non-reader. T T
- 3) I teach a 3rd grade chapter class (low reading ability). My students need more basic skills. They were not even taught to cluster or try to pronounce words by looking at the letters in the words. They just see any letter and say any word that begins with that letter. My reading classes were of a great help in coping with this years' problems. Thanks for including me in this survey. NM T
- 4) Basically, the money issue stifles many creative ventures which would ultimately motivate the student. At the beginning of the year, I introduced novels to my reading groups. Their response was very negative because they were worried that they wouldn't make progress that they could see. We use the MacMillan Reading Series, which all teachers are very unhappy with using. If you are at all familiar with the series, you will probably understand our problem. I am assigned to the students well below grade level in reading. Our major source of support for reading is our Chapter 1 program. Generally teachers seem to question the true value of the program. The program itself is centered around individualized computer work-skill drill. C A
- 5) I think education majors ought to be taught how to manage rotating 2-3 reading groups since teachers are expected to be able to do this when they teach (ie. what to have the students do at their desks while the teacher is working with one group). They are told about it, but they need some practical experience setting up a reading rotation or at least working within an established routine. C T

- 6) Numbers 1 and 2 (basals and workbooks) are the two that seem to take up more reading time; however, this appears to be a district choice! Not mine! Numbers 9 and 10 (children's literature-instructional and language experience) are areas I want to expand on next year. T T
- 7) I see students who aren't enthusiastic about reading because the material or text isn't a topic or area of information that interests them. Most boys like sports stories and often choose them for book reports. Girls show less interest in this area. If less emphasis was placed on basal readers and more emphasis on personal reading, students would show more interest in reading and find more value in this skill. In regard to promoting comprehension, vocabulary (speaking and understanding), and various other areas found in workbooks, the Language Experience method could be used, with learning centers that are geared to cover specific skills. A system that places more emphasis on individual student needs and interests would promote a more avid and accomplished reader. A class implementing such a system would be less "structured" in the traditional sense. However, such a class, or program, would require careful and sensitive planning. In my opinion, it would be a joy to promote (teach) reading in this way! T T
- 8) I believe that students learn the most about reading when they read a "real" book and when they have the opportunity to apply newly learned reading skills to other subject areas. I firmly believe that students have to become familiar with "book language" (orally) before they can adequately begin reading a text. I see a very definite need to change my reading instruction, but I'm not sure where to begin. I teach 6th and 7th grade readers who are mostly black and Mexican. These students are not motivated to read quality children's literature on their own, so I have shared books with them in class, but to no avail. I can't model adequately how to apply the reading and study skills I'm teaching to their other subject areas because communication is nonexistent between teachers in other areas. It is very difficult to find out what topics the students are covering in those classes. I feel that I rely heavily on the basal and workbooks because I have no other materials for these particular grade levels. 95% of the students I teach are very disruptive and can not function independently with a reading selection. Also...I drive 40 miles one way to work and feel very pressed for time. T T

- 9) I think Texas' list of essential elements hinder the progress a teacher can make and see in her students in reading. The list of EEs is much too lengthy and, for first grade, often too abstract. Also, I have students pulled for ESL, Chapter I, and special ed throughout my reading period, which makes it very difficult to teach these students who need it most. On a brighter note, I've found that free, silent reading works miracles. I've got students who are reading so well now, that I'd never have imagined such success at the beginning of the school year. They have taken a real interest in reading as they are able to read whatever they want during their DEAF (drop everything and read) time for the sake of pleasure. I've got several students who can't wait for me to get through roll call and lunch count etc. in the morning; they start reading before class even begins! If nothing else, I feel I have definitely instilled an enjoyment of reading into the majority of my students. T T
- 10) The newspaper is a great source for teaching students to read. Reading needs to be fun, interesting, and exciting. It doesn't matter what a student reads, just so he reads. NM NM
- 11) The school I am in insists the third grade students read at the third grade basal level. Therefore, although I requested books at the 2-1 and 2-2 level (for lower students), I was refused and instructed to teach all students regardless of ability at the same level. This was, of course, extremely frustrating. I ended up checking out beginning readers' literature from the library for use in my classroom. I teach in a school that is largely Hispanic. Even though the students could read the words using phonics skills, they didn't have the vocabulary required for reading the 3-1 and 3-2 Scott Foresman Series. I had students who could "read" at grade level but could not understand what they had read. But I could not use a lower level book. This first year's experience was contrary to everything I'd been taught in college. It was a hard, frustrating year as far as teaching reading went. C T
- 12) I really don't feel like I need the support of teachers, administrators, or curriculum directors. I teach what I need to, in order to get the job I was hired for done. I love teaching out of books that I buy for my classroom. It's called Readers Workshop. It really is a neat way to teach kids and let them have a controlled amount of responsibility at the same time! C C
- 13) I see co-workers giving the reading students ditto after ditto of phonics skills. I feel this is just burning those kids out and contributing to poor reading attitudes. C A

- 14) My district uses the whole language theory in practice. I took a course last year in W.L. after being hired to be prepared to teach in this district. I have also had to create all of my own materials to supplement each novel. I spend 4-5 hours each weekend creating reading skills materials, comprehension questions, vocabulary activities, etc. This is a time consuming process for a new teacher. I realize W.L. was not in the mainstream in education when I graduated but I hope undergraduates are being trained in it now (as well as basal and traditional approaches). I am thrilled with my students' reading interests and understanding. I love using trade books, especially well-written, carefully selected books (which we use). C C
- 15) I have been doing as much writing as possible in my classroom. I have found parents to shy away from coming in to help with editing and publishing of stories. I feel this is a wonderful process and the students have enjoyed it very much, but it is a little disheartening when I am trying to edit/publish 18 students' stories! C C
- 16) I teach bilingual students and the whole language program has improved their reading tremendously. Additional help such as Chapter I reading and resource room has brought about positive changes. Materials I use for reading: children's literature, big books, song charts, cloze activities, reading conference forms, silent reading, lots of creative writing activities, journals and book sharing. I read to them twice a day, using literature ranging from poetry to mythology, fiction to biographies. C NM
- 17) My students have spent a great deal of time in their writing. I have 3rd graders who write 7 page stories, and I have some who at the beginning of the year could only write 2 sentences. Not only has their writing improved but so has their reading capabilities and their self-esteem. The Reading/Writing connection is supported by a basal but the success is in individual writing! Reading programs at university levels must incorporate more How to teach kids to write. There is a process teachers can use in the classroom!! C C
- 18) I teach in a private school where parents are very involved. Because I am a first year teacher, I do not feel I should make too many changes. I plan to make changes gradually as I gain experience. C C
- 19) In Texas we are required to teach all students on grade-level despite their true reading abilities. We are required to follow a very set curriculum using a basal reader and workbook. The program does

provide lessons for reteaching and reinforcement of skills but I find it difficult to fit it into the overall reading program. If I had a choice, I would ask for more in-depth instruction on how to effectively use the basal reader and to integrate alternate materials into the over-all reading program. C T

From these data and comments, it seems that new teachers are receiving mixed messages with regard to teaching options, instructional decision-making, and available resources for support. Their comments indicate there is much diversity in the field of reading curriculum and instruction, and not all of this diversity is effective and/or desirable.

Additionally, the comments of these new teachers reveal the full range of pleasure and pain associated with making the transition between student and professional in the field of education. And because many of the practices and attitudes established during the first years of teaching remain as variables throughout the teacher's career, it seems especially prudent to systematically and universally address the special needs of new teachers. While any transition period for any professional is a challenge, it seems clear that new teachers would greatly benefit from a bridging and maintenance program between theory and practice: a program where university and school personnel would be involved in supporting new teachers by instituting joint mentoring programs, providing strong clinical supervision components, and perhaps most importantly revising both university and school curricula to a level where both speak the same language and both have the same literacy agenda.

For seasoned professionals who share in the belief that the collective wisdom of the generations should be diligently and carefully passed on, it is clearly time to apply the hand of support to new teachers and to the schools in which they teach. Concerted efforts to coordinate goals and strategies used and valued by universities, administrators, co-teachers, and parents will perhaps eventually result in survey data that finds new teachers to be clear about the expectations and possibilities for creating literacy environments of great worth.

SURVEY OF NEW TEACHERS

Please answer questions one through nine by **rank ordering only** those variables which affect you. For example, do not rank all the variables for each question, rank only those which apply to your situation. Use the rank of 1 for your most important teaching variable, and mark all teaching variables that are not applicable with an N/A.

Ex. When I was in first grade, my teacher used

- | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| <u>1</u> basal readers | <u>5</u> workbooks, skillbooks | <u>3</u> other |
| <u>N/A</u> language experience | <u>N/A</u> writing activities | (list) |
| <u>N/A</u> computer assisted instruction | <u>N/A</u> learning centers | <i>phonics charts</i> |
| <u>2</u> round robin reading | <u>4</u> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <u>N/A</u> free, silent reading | <u>N/A</u> children's lit-instructional | |

1. To teach reading, my undergraduate reading courses strongly encouraged me to use

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

2. Administrators encourage me to use

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

3. The majority of my fellow teachers think it is best to use

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

4. The parents of my students seem to think it is best to use

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

5. I find that I spend much of my reading instructional time using

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

6. I am concerned that I may be spending too much time using

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

7. I am concerned that I may be spending too little time using

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |
| _____ round robin reading | _____ children's lit-read by teacher | |
| _____ free, silent reading | _____ children's lit-instructional | |

8. If I could improve the way I teach reading, I would place more emphasis on

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| _____ basal readers | _____ workbooks, skillbooks | _____ other |
| _____ language experience | _____ writing activities | (list) |
| _____ computer assisted instruction | _____ learning centers | |

1. **To teach reading, my undergraduate reading courses strongly encouraged me to use**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
2. **Administrators encourage me to use**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
3. **The majority of my fellow teachers think it is best to use**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
4. **The parents of my students seem to think it is best to use**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
5. **I find that I spend much of my reading instructional time using**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
6. **I am concerned that I may be spending too much time using**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
7. **I am concerned that I may be spending too little time using**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
8. **If I could improve the way I teach reading, I would place more emphasis on**
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> basal readers | <input type="checkbox"/> workbooks, skillbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language experience | <input type="checkbox"/> writing activities | (list) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computer assisted instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> learning centers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> round robin reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-read by teacher | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> free, silent reading | <input type="checkbox"/> children's lit-instructional | |
9. **In order to confidently make an adjustment in the way I teach reading, I would need the support of (don't forget to rank your responses)**
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> my principal | <input type="checkbox"/> parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my curriculum director | <input type="checkbox"/> additional inservice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a reading consultant | <input type="checkbox"/> a graduate course in reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fellow teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> a resource for new ideas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> school board | <input type="checkbox"/> additional materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> librarian | <input type="checkbox"/> other (list) |

On the back, please list additional insights and comments you have about the way to teach students reading. For those teachers who see the need to make changes in your classrooms but who hesitate to do so, please explain your situations.

Did you remember to rank order all your responses? Thank you.