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Michigan Reading Association

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Early Childhood Reading Michigan Reading Association Position Statement

INTRODUCTION

The Michigan Reading Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association, is an organization consisting of educators and parents interested in reading instruction. Although the Michigan Reading Association is concerned about reading instruction at all levels, the Early Childhood Task Force has focused on preschool and beginning reading instruction for children ages 0-8. We believe that prereading and beginning reading instruction should be part of early childhood programs which:

- are based on an understanding that young children learn through play, concrete experiences, and other non-traditional academic activities, materials, and environments;
- are oriented to individual developmental patterns and varied learning styles;
- emphasize interrelationships among reading, language arts and other areas of the curriculum;
- emphasize expansion of experiences, language development, listening and thinking skills, social-emotional development, and perceptual motor abilities;
- emphasize creative and positive education of the total child rather than concentrating on academic skills only;
- reflect the fact that a child's positive self-concept is an essential ingredient for learning; and
- reflect concerns of parents and community for quality programs but also help parents understand the multidimensional needs of young learners from various cultures and environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent with our description of early childhood programs, the Early Childhood Task Force offers seven recommendations regarding prereading and beginning reading instruction. These recommendations should be of vital concern to members of the Michigan State Department of Education, legislators, colleges and universities, local school districts, teachers, parents and others concerned with reading at the early childhood level.

1. Broaden the concept of reading readiness.

Reading readiness should be continuous; each level of reading has prerequisite readiness skills and abilities. Reading readiness is more than dealing with the alphabet, sound/symbol relationships and other prereading skills. It includes language practice, thinking skills, concept development, experiences, book readiness skills, symbol manipulation, opportunities for children to express themselves in both oral and written form, and encouraging children to want to read.

2. Allow for personal learning styles, individual pacing and continuous progress.

The teaching of reading should be part of a creative and flexible curriculum emphasizing critical thinking, language development, the expansion of all communication skills and reflecting the personal learning styles of children. It should facilitate individual pacing and continuous progress from grade and avoid lockstep placement.

3. Allow for flexibility in style of instruction and age for beginning instruction in reading.

Teachers, parents and administrators should understand

that every child is not ready for formal reading instruction at the same age. Academically oriented reading programs which are the result of pressure from parents, administrators, other teachers and the community at large, may not serve the best interests of all children. Creative, child-oriented activities are appropriate at all levels of reading instruction.

4. Encourage communication and home/school coordination.

School personnel should make a concerted effort to communicate with parents and community regarding appropriate programs for young children especially as they relate to reading and writing in early childhood. This should facilitate coordination of programs in home, school and community as the child is introduced to the reading process.

5. Select materials to reflect curriculum objectives and individual child needs.

The materials selected for use with young children should reflect both established curriculum objectives and the interests, motivation and learning styles of individuals. Early childhood programs should be equipped with manipulative objects and other instructional materials which are consistent with the developmental need of young children. For example, equipment could include such things as blocks, easels, puppets and slides, rather than only workbooks, worksheets, abstract and symbolic materials.

6. Use evaluation for positive monitoring of child progress and programs.

Evaluation and screening methods should allow the school to adjust to meet the needs of individual children rather than

limit the child or force adjustment to the prescribed school programs. Informal activities that consider the child's total development could provide more valuable information in a less stressful situation than formal and norm-referenced instruments. Test results should be reported and interpreted to all concerned in language that is meaningful, easily understood and related to the early childhood program.

7. Require knowledge of early childhood education for supervisory personnel.

Persons involved in decisions concerning curriculum, materials, and teaching assignments for early childhood education should have knowledge of, and experience in, child development, early childhood, education and reading.

Prepared by the MRA Early Childhood Task Force.

Adopted on May 15, 1982 by the Michigan Reading Association Board of Directors'.

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