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The Public and the Reading Professional

Walter H. MacGinitie

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to tell you about the direction I have tried to give to the work of the International Reading Association this year. As a professional educational association, the IRA can have its greatest impact by focusing its own attention and the attention of others on the welfare of children and other learners. By keeping this focus, the IRA will not only help children and other learners but will discover it is also taking the most effective possible approach to serving the needs of its own professional members.

There is widespread recognition of the paramount importance of knowing how to read well. Thus, we begin with a general acceptance of the importance of what professionals in reading are *trying* to do. However, there is not yet a general understanding of what professionals in reading *can* do. We now *do* know a great deal about how to teach people to read well. Most teachers who are specially trained in reading are competent and effective. We need to let people know that we are concerned for children, that we are working hard to help children, and that we are effective in our work.

There are several ways in which the IRA is now trying to get this message across. One of these ways is through helping state and local councils learn how to be more effective in communicating with state legislatures and state and local education authorities. Regional Leadership Workshops now include a component on legislation. At the Annual Convention and at regional conferences, the programs for council leaders are being given a strong emphasis on legislation. The Director of Membership and Council Relations at IRA Headquarters has been assigned major responsibility for legislative programs. The IRA Legislative Committee, chaired by Barbara Valdez of California, is developing a model workshop and a council handbook on legislative activities.

A second way in which IRA is working to make clear the value and importance of trained professionals is through direct public information activities. The IRA Public Information Officer has just

announced the availability of a 13-part radio series of four-minute programs on reading education. A group of radio spot announcements on the importance of reading and reading instruction and a new slide and tape presentation on IRA are now also available. A series of short brochures for parents, a group of television spot announcements and a series of short newspaper articles will all be ready soon.

A third approach is to work directly with key groups such as parents and administrators. The IRA Parents and Reading Committee, chaired by Pat Koppman of California, has given a number of workshops on how to help parents help children and how to involve parents in local council activities. These workshops will lead to a council handbook on parents and reading. Parents who learn more about reading and who attend council meetings usually develop a better appreciation for the complexity of reading, a recognition that there is no one best way to teach reading to all children, and a respect for the knowledge and dedication of reading professionals. The committee is planning a special program for parents at the Miami Beach convention.

A special session and program sequence for administrators was planned for Miami Beach. Administrators must make many decisions that affect the reading program. If the administrator understands reading instruction and the contribution that trained professionals can make, the administrator's decisions will contribute more toward building a strong reading program.

These are just some of the steps that IRA is taking to build better understanding of the value of professional educators who are well trained in reading. Individual members of IRA and of local councils can multiply the effectiveness of IRA's work by building constructive relationships with parents, school board members, administrators, and the public. These relationships should be based on mutual recognition of the importance of reading to children and, thus, the importance of sound professional training for teachers and reading specialists.