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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE . . .

WITH OUR REMEDIAL READING PROGRAMS?

by Wallace Messer

What kinds of remedial reading programs do we have in the schools of Michigan? What are the qualifications of the teachers participating in these special reading programs? How do school district personnel feel about their programs and their reading teachers?

To find the answers to these questions, the investigator made use of the annual reports filed by school districts in Lansing, and also mailed questionnaires to 321 Michigan school districts (207 participants in state-funding under the Michigan Remedial Reading Act of 1966 and 114 districts that did not participate in such funding). A 77% response was received from the districts with state-funded remedial reading programs, and 50% of the non-funded school districts returned the questionnaire.¹

Qualifications of Teachers

As far as the qualifications of the special reading teachers are concerned, the Michigan Remedial Reading Act has appeared to have had a very beneficial effect. The Act stipulates that in order to be fully qualified for state reimbursement a teacher must meet the following qualifications: (a) Have a baccalaureate degree, (b) have taught three years, (c) have completed at least twelve semester hours in the area of reading, at least six of which shall involve the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties. During the first year of the Act, only 43% of the teachers met these qualifications, whereas by 1970, 77% of the special reading personnel were so qualified. The net result has therefore been the emergence of a large group of highly

trained and experienced special reading teachers to serve Michigan's school children.

When school district personnel were asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with the qualifications of their special reading teachers, 58% stated that the qualifications were extremely satisfactory, 36% generally satisfactory, 5% reported the qualifications of their reading staffs as limited, and 1% indicated that the qualifications were unsatisfactory.²

An interesting relationship was discovered between the qualifications of special reading teachers and the incidence of problems in administering the program. A direct relationship was found between reading staffs with high qualifications and the low incidence of problems experienced by school districts in organizing and administering their remedial reading programs. This was significant beyond the .05 level, when subjected to chi square statistical analysis.³

Characteristics of Programs

When the data were analyzed to determine the similarities among existing programs, the following characteristics were found to be common to at least 75% of the school districts whose remedial reading programs were funded by the state.

1. The primary mode of remedial reading instruction involved small group or individual instruction outside the regular classroom in 88% of the school districts. Among the remainder, 9% acted as consultants to teachers, 2% served as clinicians, and 1% provided instruction within the regular classroom.

2. The co-ordination of the remedial reading program and the regular classroom activities was accomplished by conferences between the remedial and classroom teachers in 91% of the cases. Written communication provided the co-ordination in 4% of the districts; 2% used various other methods, while 3% of the districts attempted no co-ordination whatsoever.
3. A clearly outlined testing program was in existence.
4. There was a comprehensive policy for admitting students to the program.
5. Standardized group reading tests were used to evaluate the progress of remedial students.
6. School district personnel expressed the feeling that modifications were needed in their remedial reading programs.⁴

Feelings About Programs

When school district personnel were asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with their remedial reading programs, they reported as follows:

Extremely satisfied: 15%

Generally satisfied: 70%

Generally dissatisfied: 12%

Extremely dissatisfied: 3%⁵

In response to another item on the questionnaire, 89% of the school districts indicated that improvements or modifications were needed in their programs; but only 39% were actually involved in modifying their remedial reading programs.⁶ This data, gathered in the spring of 1970, would appear to indicate that many school districts are seeking ways to improve upon their remedial reading efforts but are unsure as to the direction to take in altering programs, policies, or personnel assignments.

FOOTNOTES

1. Wallace S. Messer, "An Analysis of the Effects of the Michigan Remedial Reading Act of 1966 Upon the Remedial Reading Programs and the Qualifications of Remedial Reading Teachers." Unpublished Ed. D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1970.
 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.
 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.
 4. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 6. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

A Conclusion . . .

And a Challenge

It is the opinion of the author that the time is ripe for concerned persons in the field of reading to meet together for the specific purpose of discussing existing programs in remedial reading in Michigan schools and, in so far as possible, to delineate guidelines that could be of assistance in the administration and operation of these programs. Perhaps recommendations to the State Department of Education would evolve from such a meeting, requesting research projects that would evaluate different approaches to helping the disabled reader. The annual conference of the Michigan Reading Association could provide the forum for an in-depth study group to come to grips with this topic. Alternate approaches might involve regional or county-wide meetings to consider the same problem.

Personal whims, pet theories, and tight money belts have dictated programs, policies, and personnel needs in much of education, including efforts to extend the "right to read" to all children. At the present time, reading programs range in emphasis from the clinical to the developmental in various school districts; with still other districts attempting to effect a happy marriage in some way between in-class corrective programs and out-of-class remediation. In many school districts, frustrations over the lack of desired results have produced periodic modifications or reversals in their programs to try to improve upon past performances. Some districts appear to be unaware or unconcerned that any program changes might be needed.

Where do we go from here?

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