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Reading and writing are perceived by both the faculty and the students of several nearby school districts as less important to classroom success than speaking or listening. Listening is almost without exception identified as the most important communication skills area.

Planning for and Evaluating Effective Reading Programs: The California Model¹

Davida A. Eggherman

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As part of California's recent School Improvement Program, the California State Department of Education has published several documents to help educators and parents plan, implement, and evaluate school program improvement in the interest of improved student achievement (1,2). Among the documents most pertinent to reading curricula is the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Reading Program* (4). This handbook identifies three major components of a high-quality reading program. It is designed to help educators and community evaluate present or proposed reading programs for their inherent strengths and weaknesses, and to determine strategies for changing these programs.

As outlined in the handbook, before assessing the effectiveness of any program the educator must identify such components and then question whether these components are a part of the program in question. The following tasks may serve as practical guidelines for both planning and evaluation:

1. The consideration of instruction and activities that are directed at the development of *comprehension* skills;
2. The consideration of provisions for substantial amounts of time for students to *read*, using a wide range of purposes and materials for reading;
3. The recognition of the importance of *motivation* and *relevance* as prerequisites to the development of reading skills; and
4. The consideration of how reading is integrated into a *total language program* (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in all classes.

The emphasis, then, is on an integrated approach to language learning rather than isolated skill instruction. This emphasis is supported by the "Essentials of Education":

The interdependence of skills and content is the central concept of the essentials of education. Skills and abilities do not grow in isolation from content. In all subjects, students develop skills in using language and other symbol systems; they develop the ability to

reason; they undergo experiences that lead to emotional and social maturity. Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking and writing *about* science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of intellectual, social and cultural heritage (3).

ESSENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS

The "essential" instructional components of an effective reading program reinforce one another and cannot be isolated from each other. These major instructional components and their sub-components are:

1. Skill Development (Comprehension, Language processing, Fluency and flexibility)
2. Motivation
3. Application (Reading and responding to literature, Reading in the content areas, Recreational reading, Study skills, Practical uses of reading)

The following chart defines the components and sub-components listed above and suggests some questions to pose in planning or evaluating a school's reading program.

1. The author acknowledges Louis Honig, Jr. JoEllyn Taylor for their contributions to this article.

KEY INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS

QUESTIONS

1. SKILL DEVELOPMENT

a. Comprehension

The ability to understand the meaning and significance of ideas, and:

- 1) Establish a habit of expecting and getting meaning from print.
- 2) Develop the ability to comprehend information at a range of levels.

b. Language Processing

The use of linguistic information to transmit thought:

- 1) Symbolic information: the alphabet, word recognition, phonetics.
- 2) Syntactic information: grammar, word order, sentence patterns.
- 3) Semantic information: meaning, vocabulary, idiom, and metaphor.

c. Fluency and Flexibility

The ability to read with ease and comfort, and to adopt reading rate and style to immediate purpose.

2. MOTIVATION

A perception of reading as being personally and socially attainable, useful, enjoyable, and desirable.

3. APPLICATION

a. Reading & responding to literature

The ability to read fine literature, refine personal values through interaction with literature and become motivated, life-long readers.

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM PROVIDE FOR:

- 1) Experiences that help students recognize comprehension as the over-all goal of reading?
- 2) Sufficient instruction to help students achieve various levels of comprehension: literal, interpretive, applicative, and critical?
- 3) Using and extending students' oral communication as the basis for reading comprehension?
- 4) A range of reading materials?

- 1) Frequent opportunities for students to use and extend their oral language skills and use the three cue systems of written language in combination?
- 2) Regular opportunities for students to hear the oral reading of written language?

- 1) Activities that require students to focus on reading fluency and monitor their own fluency?
- 2) Frequent activities that require students to use various rates of reading and to adapt their reading to meet different kinds of reading materials?

- 1) Modeling reading and writing as useful and desirable activities?
- 2) Frequent opportunities for students to interact with one another and self-select their material?
- 3) Opportunities for success?
- 4) Making a variety of material available?

- 1) A number of opportunities for students to read for personal pleasure and relate others' ideas to their own ideas?
- 2) Frequent opportunities to read or listen to high-quality literature?

b. Reading in the content areas

The use of reading skills in all subjects and the application and extension of these skills to understand the concepts, vocabulary, and unique characteristics of a particular subject area or topic.

c. Recreational reading

The ability to perceive and use reading as a desirable and pleasurable use of one's time.

d. Study skills

The development and use of independent study skills involving reading to acquire, assimilate, and synthesize knowledge effectively.

e. Practical uses

The regard for and use of reading as an important, practical tool in everyday living.

- 1) Pre-reading activities?
- 2) Time for effective reading of content material?
- 3) Post-reading activities?
- 4) Reading skills taught in conjunction with content area objectives?
- 5) Instructional activities which have comprehension as the central goal?

- 1) Regularly scheduled periods of sustained silent reading?
- 2) Easy access to a variety of books and other materials?
- 3) Opportunities for students to purchase their own books?

- 1) Opportunity for students to set goals for reading and use independent study methods?
- 2) Instruction in learning to locate and use printed information, i.e., encyclopedia, card catalog?
- 3) Instruction in learning how to use maps, graphs, charts, etc.?
- 4) Instruction in learning to organize information, i.e., outlining, note-taking, summarizing?

- 1) Opportunities for students to learn to use reading to gain basic survival information, i.e., reading signs and labels?
- 2) Instruction in how to locate telephone books, catalogues, newspapers, maps, etc.?
- 3) Instruction in using reading for functional purposes, e.g., completing application forms?

SUMMARY

Educators who plan or evaluate effective reading programs should look first for inclusion of each of the "essential" components of an effective reading program. The questions provided here may be used to determine whether each component is adequately included in the program and whether there is a balance among the components.

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