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The Intensive Reading Instructional Teams Project Welcomes Interest from Michigan Educators

Anna M. Cimochofski

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Project Dissemination Director for IRIT.*

The Intensive Reading Instructional Teams Project is an exemplary program in the National Diffusion Network which is being disseminated nationwide. The IRIT project is available for adoption in Michigan school districts.

Inquiries from educators in Michigan who would like to know more about the IRIT model are welcomed.

The Intensive Reading Instructional Teams project began as a summer program in 1965 in Hartford, Connecticut. Although the IRIT model was JDRP (Joint Dissemination Review Panel)-approved for grades three and four, the model has been used with youngsters from grades one through junior high school. At the developer's site there are seven IRITs operating under Title I funding, and an eighth team which is funded by Title VII. The latter services youngsters whose dominant language is Spanish.

IRIT is a laboratory reading project. Three highly skilled teachers of reading and a part-time secretary or clerk-aide make up a team. One of the team members is designated as a team leader by the Project Director. The team leader acts as a coordinator of team activities and as a liaison between the team and parents, classroom teachers, project director, and school principal.

An IRIT services a maximum of 45 youngsters per cycle. There are three 1-week cycles a year, with a maximum of 135 students receiving intensive reading instruction. Students selected for IRIT are usually a year or more below grade level in reading. Selection is based on previous test score results and classroom teacher recommendations.

Once the students are selected, a battery of diagnostic tests are given at the outset of each cycle with another form of the tests given at the conclusion of each cycle. Following the initial testing, the children are

divided into groups of 15.

Three separate classrooms are required, each teacher with his/her own room and concentrating in one of the three key areas of reading: Encoding/Decoding, Vocabulary/Comprehension, and Individualized Reading. Spelling, oral communication, listening, writing, and handwriting are incorporated into three reading areas.

Children spend the entire morning at an IRIT center and move in groups of 15 from area to area. In each of the areas instruction is intensive and individualized. The atmosphere of an IRIT classroom is free and warm, but also orderly and serious. Instruction for 45 youngsters takes place for three hours each morning, five days a week for ten weeks. It is recognized that adaptations may be necessary in some school districts.

To assure maximum success it is essential for team members to coordinate instruction in all three reading areas. Team teachers use the afternoons for this as well as to meet with parents and classroom teachers, to attend in-service sessions, or to present in-service sessions, to organize the monthly newsletter, to develop booklets for parents, or to plan for such things as the mid-cycle open house, commencement exercises, or a dinner get-together for the parents of IRIT children.

Teachers, parents, and youngsters have had high praise for the project. The children who have attended IRIT show on the average from .5 to 1.5 years growth in reading during the ten-week cycle and, more importantly, develop self-confidence and a desire to read. These changes are reflected in other school subjects.

In 1974 the IRIT project was one of the six original programs selected for packaging and widespread dissemination by what was then the U.S. Office of Education. Cost Effectiveness and student impact were

the main reasons the project was selected. Local project evaluations showed consistently high gains for IRIT youngsters. As a check on these results, scores of IRIT students on a district-wide testing program were examined. It was observed that IRIT students went from the 8th percentile in the fall to the 22nd percentile in the spring (PIP, 1976).

Although IRIT was developed in an urban area and adopted in other urban areas, the model has been equally successful in rural and suburban school districts both as a four to six-week summer program and a 10 to 11-week cycle program which operates during the regular school year.

Funding sources for adoption of the IRIT model have included monies from Title I, Title IV-C (state, local), and Title VII.

For information on funding sources which might be available to assist your school district in adoption of the IRIT model contact your State Facilitator Center:

Deborah Clemmons
Michigan State Facilitator
Michigan Department of Education
P.O. Box 3008
Lansing, Michigan 48909
(517) 373-1806

For information on the IRIT model contact:

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The following references afford additional information:

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Sex Differences and Strategies For Successful Early Reading

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The importance of sex differences as they influence learning to read is generally recognized. Low reading groups consist primarily of boys, and more boys than girls are retained. Some boys with average intelligence seem less ready for pre-reading and reading instruction in kindergarten and first grade than girls of similar ability and chronological age. Teachers of young children are therefore confronted with the practical consequences of sex differences in reading achievement.

Boys mature more slowly than girls and are often nearly a year behind physically by school age (7). Dramatic differences in male and female brain functioning give girls an advantage in language, linguistic abilities, and fine motor performance while boys show superiority in visual acuity and gross total body activities (9). Research clearly has determined that a developmental lag does exist; however, the disparity in reading achievement appears to be a phenomenon of the Western world rather than a universal occurrence.

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Johnson examined sex differences in reading across English-speaking cultures and found boys in grades two, four, and six scored higher than girls on most reading tests in England and Nigeria; in Canada and the United States girls generally scored higher than boys (6). Preston researched the reading achievement of fourth grade German children and found boys' reading scores were higher than those of girls (8). Gross studied sex-role standards and reading achievement among Israeli Kibbutz children in kindergarten, grade two, and grade five. No significant difference was found in the reading performance level of boys and girls. Gross noted both sexes perceived reading as sex-appropriate (4).

The correlation of the slower physical maturing of boys and the later age at which they learn to read may have been improperly interpreted as cause and effect. Cross-cultural studies suggest maturational lag might not be the single cause of the sex differential in early

reading progress. An environmental explanation must be considered.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

Available data indicate that boys differ from girls in needs, interests, and characteristics (10, 3). Attitudes, motivation, and behavior of boys and girls in early formalized education are perceived as partially a reflection of cultural expectations and sex-stereotyping. Johnson and Greenbaum report that a conflict exists between the student role and the sex role for some boys because "boys receive a double message; be passive, quiet and conforming as a student but also be aggressive, active, achieving and independent socially. Therefore, some boys will experience conflict and stress in school, and this could result in dissatisfaction, lower achievement, and/or lower self-esteem" (5, p. 494). They observe that the student role and sex role are congruent and reinforcing for girls. "However, the danger for girls is that while achieving they will be socialized too greatly into behavior not compatible with effective adult functioning" (5, p. 494).