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Richard W. Burnett
University of Missouri, St. Louis

Thomas R. Schnell
University of Missouri, St. Louis

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A LOOK AT THE FUTURE: TEACHERS IN NON-TRADITIONAL ADULT READING PROGRAMS

Richard W. Burnett and Thomas R. Schnell
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—ST. LOUIS

Currently, the job market for those equipped to teach reading and reading related skills to older adolescents and adults in non-school settings is clearly changing and possibly expanding while the demand for teachers to teach only in traditional school-based settings is declining.

In the past, colleges and universities have regularly offered preservice and in-service coursework in reading instructional techniques for elementary and secondary teachers as a part of their teacher education offerings. Advanced work frequently is offered for teachers who want to specialize in reading instruction, but such training is generally intended to turn out specialists to teach remedial reading and to organize and supervise reading programs in typical elementary or secondary schools. Those employed to teach in adult basic education projects, high school equivalency programs, commercial reading improvement enterprises, vocational schools, training academies for firemen and policemen, or university reading and study improvement centers are usually personnel trained in traditional school approaches to reading instruction. However, these same traditional school-oriented reading teachers are now being found in even more divergent roles in the rapidly growing areas of business and industrial training and development. In these positions, teachers are expected to extrapolate from their school-based training and work experience to the designing and offering of reading instruction in settings that may require services that are markedly different from those required in traditional school-based programs.

Basis for Concern

There are several reasons for the resurgence of interest in non-traditional adult reading programs that justify comparing and contrasting such programs to traditional reading programs. A major one is the search for "new markets" on the part of teacher educators faced with a lessened demand for teachers because of dropping school enrollments. Additionally, there exists a widespread perception on the part of employers that a sizable proportion of their personnel are deficient in reading and related communication skills. As a result it is becoming more widely accepted that corporations must provide training to improve these

skills. Further, these corporations must orient those responsible for disseminating necessary information within the corporation as to the best methods for transmitting continuously changing technical information to those needing it for their jobs. To put it another way, in business and industry there is a concern with training lower level technicians to receive and process essential information accurately, while at the same time there is a recognition that the higher level management and technical development personnel need assistance in the preparation and effective presentation of information to those technicians on line or in the field. We are talking about a very close comparison here to the schools, where pupils are being taught to read while teachers are being helped to prepare and/or select instructional materials appropriate for these pupils. The instructional technology useful to teachers and to reading specialists can, in this way, be applicable in non-traditional adult reading programs.

It is speculative to argue that print literacy is on the decline in this country, but there is some support for that belief. There is, at the very least, a strong possibility that increasing segments of the population are turning away from lengthy involvement with printed matter and are finding the television screen a more attractive source of information as well as entertainment. Trend data for the last fifteen to twenty years have been used to support the contention that print literacy as traditionally defined is on the decline. Even though intensive teaching in early grades is resulting in children picking up coding features of print language better than previously, competition with print by electronic media is at least one factor contributing to holding down population achievement averages. In a future society with increasingly complex technology, other avenues for information transmittal may need to be used to augment or replace printed material. To the extent that printed communication may be perceived as more useful than other emerging communication media, training programs beyond the schools will need to be directed at teaching reading and writing skills as these relate to performance on specific jobs.

Education Versus Training

What are the basic differences between reading instruction in schools and that in non-traditional programs? The first important difference tends to be in the time frame. Schools have the luxury of years to develop reading and related skills. In adult programs, the time frame typically tends to be weeks or months. Secondly, in schools the learning outcomes tend to be general or global, with specific competencies and isolated skills presented en route to those broad objectives. Educators in schools see motivating or "real life" learning activities as a means of imparting skills that can be applied later on in a variety of higher educational, occupational, or adult role settings. In contrast, instructors in non-school settings are teaching direct application of learnings to meet immediately recognized job or role requirements. The characteristics of a lengthy time frame and broad learning objectives apply to education. The character-

istics of short time duration and highly specific learning objectives apply to what is generally called "training" rather than education. Reading teachers often fail to differentiate "educational" objectives from "training" objectives. This is certainly understandable if we keep in mind the heavy emphasis on "remedial reading" points of view which so permeate all school reading instruction. Remedial reading tends to follow a "training" model, since it usually is offered in shorter time frames and is aimed at highly specific learning outcomes rather than broad, general objectives. In schools, training efforts are perceived as short term interventions intended to contribute to the eventual accomplishment of broader, long term educational goals. "Getting the pupil's reading achievement up to grade level" is an example of a short term objective. The good intention behind the objective is that once attained, the pursuit of education can continue, without a handicapping condition.

In non-school settings, the training efforts are directed to an immediate and usually readily apparent goal. A common example would be to read the installation and maintenance manuals related to a job. Even in high school equivalency programs, training usually focuses on being able to score above the cut-offs on specified tests to the point that passing the tests becomes the immediate and readily apparent goal. In training programs, once the criterion objective is met, the program is completed for the learner. Usually little or no thought is given to how one training segment is related to others.

This limited contrasting of education and training is meant to support the claim that reading educators might have more than they realize to contribute to the preparation of planners and instructors for non-traditional adult reading programs. Conversely, a closer analysis of training programs conducted outside of school might well have implications for improving the quality of instructional efforts within the schools.

School-based Reading Technology and Non-traditional Programs

An expanding research literature has appeared in the seventies relating to the teaching of reading comprehension. The focus on comprehension is partly due to the increasingly widespread acceptance of a psycholinguistic point of view which conveys the strong belief that effective comprehension of printed text is the obvious goal in reading and that an extreme concern with sub-skills in the past has been counterproductive. Common sense reinforced by years of field studies establishes that comprehension efficiency can be improved in specific fields, in specific tasks, or in specific roles, if reading instruction and practice are directed toward specific fields, specific tasks, or specific roles. If increased efficiency in reading science materials is wanted, directed practice in the reading of science materials is needed. If increased efficiency in reading newspapers is wanted, directed practice in the reading of newspapers is needed. If increased efficiency in reading recipes is wanted, directed practice in reading recipes is needed. The return obtainable on an investment in teaching time and energy is, apparently, directly related to

how narrowly we focus on the type of reading we want our students to do. Many educators have awakened to this realization as a consequence of their attempts to prepare pupils to pass state mandated minimum competency tests. Eighth graders reading at what might generally be considered a third grade level can be taught to pass eighth grade tests in specific content or skill areas much more effectively by teaching them to read content closely related to the test items rather than by attempting to teach them general reading skills as the means to cope with the tests. The competent reading teacher, while teaching the vocabulary and concepts relevant to the test, can also be incidentally improving word analysis skills and imparting comprehension strategies which are applicable more broadly than to the specific test content alone. Such competence on the part of a reading teacher requires much more of the teacher than a mechanistic dependence on commercially available materials or a slavish commitment to programmed phonics sequences.

In spite of a general acceptance of the principle that reading comprehension efficiency tends to be specific to the prior practice and experience of the learner, a major concern of the research on comprehension is to establish what generalizable strategies can be taught to pupils that are transferrable to a wide variety of reading types. The findings regarding generalizable strategies tend to indicate that these strategies are not ordinarily picked up inductively and transferred from one reading situation to another but must be modeled, practiced, and repeatedly demonstrated to be applicable in varied types of material. A commonly taught strategy of this type is SQ3R or a derivative. Related strategies would include using topic sentences in the search for main ideas, using outlining principles, specifying pronoun referents, systematically identifying and using parenthetical explanations, explicating semantic principles through semantic mapping, anticipating coming events and predicting outcomes, relating newly read-about events and experiences to older ones, and practicing paraphrasing, abstracting and summarizing. Practice in using text-provided cueing systems is also common, including the use of such things as tables of contents, topical subheadings, topical overviews, summaries, tables, and other illustrations.

The proficient reading teacher in a school setting doubtless has polished a number of technical competencies that are applicable to non-traditional adult reading settings. Skill at examining reading behavior and perceiving with strengths are operating and what weaknesses are evident comes out of continuous application of informal reading observation and recording techniques. A sense of what readers can handle without teacher direction or being able to assess how much preparatory help and the nature of preparation to insure efficient reading comes from experiences with reading observations and from insights gained through working with a wide variety of learners. A practical knowledge of the principles of estimating reading difficulty with implications for selecting materials, adapting available materials or writing suitable text material, and preparing instructional plans designed to achieve a high level of mastery is another set of technical competencies that the school reading teacher can bring to bear

in a non-traditional adult reading program. As indicated before, the ability to review and teach word analysis principles almost without learner awareness, while the principal focus is on obtaining the meaning from textual material, is another major competency that an experienced reading teacher can bring to bear in teaching older adolescents and adults in non-school settings.

In, indeed, the definition of literacy needs broadening and the vehicles of information transmitting are increasingly going beyond print materials, the reading teacher can play a large role in assisting in the preparation of instructional materials. At the very least, the experienced reading teacher ought to be able to assist in matching materials and the medium for presenting information to a given set of learners. Reading technology can help in determining whether certain information can be presented in printed text to a given audience and can aid in selecting the most efficient means for presenting that information in print. By the same token, reading technology will be called into play increasingly to help determine whether modes of presentation other than print are likely to be more appropriate for a target audience. These modes of presentation often tend to be more costly than print, but where learning efficiency is the salient criterion, it may be necessary to go to these other modes. In such an event, a competent reading teacher has the technical skill to render a judgment as to whether the print medium is appropriate or to sample the population reading skills as a basis for making such a determination.

Emerging Technology

Television over the last thirty years has been seen by some as a definite deterrent in the acquisition of high level print literacy on the part of the general population. The early promise was that television would broaden and deepen experiential and language background, build meaning vocabularies, and motivate widescale interest in books and printed matter. It is apparent that, for whatever reasons, it has not lived up to this promise. However, it might well be that the cathode ray tube (CRT) or television screen coupled with the microcomputer will trigger a return to a form of print literacy that is altogether different from what was commonly conceptualized in the past. Books may go out of vogue but print communication may survive as a consequence of its use on video screens. The probability is that the CRT coupled with the microcomputer will become not only an instrument of communication but will develop into an instructional device in language (reading and writing) that offers a flexibility and power unequalled by any instructional materials or programs ever before available.

We have yet to see reading instructional programs available on cost efficient microcomputers that compare with some of the multi-mode simulation programs available on main frame computers such as simulation trainers for airline pilots, for example. There is no reason to assume, however, that comparable programs in reading instruction will not be available by the end of the decade. Microcomputers utilizing disc collections and tied to cable tele-

vision networks can offer the advantages of main frame computer networks at far less cost and far greater access to users.

Hopefully, it will be reading teacher educators and reading teachers trained and experienced in school reading instructional programs who ultimately influence the development of (or develop themselves) the best of these computer-based materials. But, it is going to be those reading teacher educators and reading teachers who have had an awareness all along of what goes on outside traditional school-based reading instructional programs who play a significant part in these future developments.

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