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# READING REQUIREMENTS AND BASIC SECONDARY TEACHER CERTIFICATION: AN UPDATE

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In their article concerning the need for content teachers to respond effectively to reading needs of their students, Estes and Piercey (1973) reported that a mere four states and the District of Columbia required training in reading education for *all* certificated secondary teachers. At that time, those authors rather despairingly commented:

One can seriously question whether there is much real concern for the fact that so many high school pupils cannot read, judging by the requirements, and presumably the expectations, of secondary teachers.

The regrettable condition will undoubtedly persist. Certification agencies will slowly if ever, adjust their requirements to include training in the teaching for secondary teachers. (p. 21).

About two years later, Bader (1975) surveyed the fifty states and Washington, D.C. to determine whether there was any change in the status of certification requirements as described by Estes and Piercey. Bader's findings boded optimism as she reported a substantial increase in the number of states requiring reading education for both temporary and permanent secondary certification.

Being involved with pre-service training of content teachers in a state which requires by law courses in reading method, we raised the following question: Since only two such studies appear in the widely circulated professional literature, were the findings reported by Bader truly representative of a positive trend toward a commitment to reading, or had the earlier comments of Estes and Piercey proven to be more prophetic?

To resolve this issue as well as bring this body of information on certification standards up-to-date, we replicated these earlier surveys with a questionnaire adapted from Piercey's instrument used in her investigation of 1973. Our survey form included an additional item which asked for a description or outline of how the reading requirement(s) came to be (if in existence). The item was worded: "Could you briefly describe the legislative or executive process resulting in this certification requirement?"

The data were collected during December of 1978 and January of 1979. In addition to the District of Columbia, all fifty states were contacted.

Forty-nine of the fifty-one agencies returned completed questionnaires and/or complete copies of their respective certification codes. The remaining two agencies were contacted and responses to the questionnaire were ascertained via telephone interview. All data were subjected to three separate analyses by independent judges; discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Complete results of the survey are presented in summarized form in Table I. (Because information had to be inferred from some responses, findings are subject to errors of interpretation; we believe these occurrences to be minimal, however.) The table is organized horizontally by informational categories deemed most salient; vertical entries are arranged alphabetically.

TABLE I  
SUMMARY OF CERTIFICATION DATA

STATE	CERTIFICATION STATUS	TEACHING FIELDS AFFECTED	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	CODE SPECIFICATIONS
ALABAMA	Considering	N R	N R	N R
ALASKA	No	N A	N A	Approved training program
ARIZONA	Yes	All areas	October 1, 1976 Law effective	Two reading courses (one a practicum including decoding skills)
ARKANSAS	No	N A	N A	N A
CALIFORNIA	Yes	All areas except art, music, home economics, industrial arts, physical education	1971	Three-four semester units
COLORADO	Yes	All areas	November 1, 1976	Must be part of an approved program "Specific preparation in theory, methods, practices in the teaching of reading"
CONNECTICUT	Yes	English only	December, 1971	Three hours in Developmental Reading in Secondary Schools
DELAWARE*	Being discussed	N A	N A	N A
FLORIDA	Yes	All areas	September, 1974	Competency based upon either university courses or inservices
GEORGIA	Yes	English, special education	July 1, 1976	Three semester hours in the Teaching of Reading
HAWAII	No (see entry in next column)	Reading considered a separate secondary teaching field	January 1, 1978	Only as required in an approved training program
IDAHO	Considering	N R	N R	N R
ILLINOIS	No	N A	N A	University program option
INDIANA	Yes	All areas	August 1, 1978	Three semester hours that "develops understanding of reading problems encountered by secondary students in subject matter oriented materials"
IOWA	Yes	English only	N R	N R
KANSAS*	"May be" under consideration	N R	N R	N R
KENTUCKY	Yes	English only, but considering all fields	September 1, 1976	One course in the Teaching of Reading

STATE	CERTIFICATION STATUS	TEACHING FIELDS AFFECTED	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	CODE SPECIFICATIONS
LOUISIANA	Yes	All areas	September, 1977	Six semester hours in the Teaching of Reading.
MAINE	Considering	N R	N R	N R
MARYLAND	Yes	English, Social Studies	N R	Three credit hours in special methods in teaching reading.
MASSACHUSETTS	No	N A	N A	N A
MICHIGAN	Considering	N R	Uncertain	N R
MINNESOTA	Considering	N R	Not determined	N A
MISSISSIPPI	Yes	All areas	July 1, 1979 - law enacted Fall, 1981 - law effective	One course, three semester hours, called Reading in the Secondary Schools.
MISSOURI	Yes, but revisions are under way.	English currently but others in 1984	1977 present law 1984 effective date for new law	One course, two semester hours, called Teaching Reading in Secondary Schools.
MONTANA	Yes	In 1983 all content areas will receive endorsement from 7-12. At that time, yes.	October, 1978 - law enacted 1985 - law effective	"Knowledge of reading and writing skills will be required."
NEBRASKA	Considering	N R	April, 1979	N R
NEVADA	No	N A	N A	N A
NEW HAMPSHIRE	Considering	N R	1979	N R
NEW JERSEY	Yes	All areas	September 1, 1977	Two courses, six semester hours, in the teaching of reading as it pertains to the subject areas.
NEW MEXICO	Yes	All areas	March 8, 1976 - law enacted July 1, 1982 - law effective	Three semester hours in reading, process, methods and materials in content areas."
NEW YORK	No	N A	N A	N A
NORTH CAROLINA	Yes	All areas	1974	Three semester hours in content, reading skills and work study skills.
NORTH DAKOTA	No	N A	N A	N A
OHIO	Yes	All areas	December 9, 1974 - law effective July 1, 1980 - full compliance expected	"The teaching of reading, as it pertains to the field for which certification is being sought."
OKLAHOMA	Considering	N R	Uncertain	N R
OREGON	Yes	All areas	December 8, 1971 - law enacted October 15, 1972 - law effective	Two courses required. "A general course in teaching reading and writing and an advanced course in teaching reading."
PENNSYLVANIA	Yes	All areas	Original law in 1969, revisions in 1976	Competency based with institutional responsibility.
RHODE ISLAND	No	N A	N A	N A
SOUTH CAROLINA	Yes	English only	1971	One course, three semester hours, in the Teaching of Secondary Reading.
SOUTH DAKOTA	Yes	N A	July 1, 1978	Three semester hours in Reading in the Content Areas.
TENNESSEE	Considering	N R	Not established	N R
TEXAS	Considering	N R	Indefinite	N R

STATE	CERTIFICATION STATUS	TEACHING FIELDS AFFECTED	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	CODE SPECIFICATIONS
UTAH	Yes	All areas	January, 1977 law enacted; September 1, 1978 law effective	Demonstrated competency in the teaching of reading in the content area
VERMONT	Yes	All areas	1978	Six credit hours or demonstrated competency in nine areas
VIRGINIA	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
WASHINGTON	No	N/A	N/A	The state encourages the inclusion of such course content
WEST VIRGINIA	Yes	All areas	1974 law enacted; February 5, 1976 law revised and enacted	Specific standards and competencies in content reading
WISCONSIN	Yes	All areas	July 1, 1977	One course in the Teaching of Reading
WYOMING	Yes	All areas	School year of 1979-1980	Two semester hours or workshop equivalent in the theory, methods, and related practice in the teaching of reading
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	Yes	All areas	1971	Three credit hours in the Teaching of Reading

#### Key

\*Not included in "considering" total because of uncertainty

N/R -- No Response on Questionnaire

N/A -- Category Deemed Not Applicable by Researchers

Although our intent was to assemble the data into a comprehensive reference table, some noteworthy information emerged that warrants further discussion. For example, Piercey's 1973 study revealed a total of nine states that required training in reading education of at least some secondary content teachers. In 1975, Bader reported eighteen states required such training. The results of our 1979 survey indicated 28 agencies now have some requirements in their licensing codes. In six years, therefore, the number of agencies requiring some training/competencies for secondary content teachers has tripled.

When the number of states who have requirements and those who are considering instituting such requirements are combined into a single category, a similar increase is noted. Piercey's study reported seventeen states, 34%, requiring or considering; Bader's 1975 data identified this statistic to be 55%. According to our findings, approximately 75% of the respondents now fall into this category. In short, it appears that the trend suggested by Bader is indeed real.

It is also important to note that several agencies (e.g., Illinois, Hawaii, Alaska) who indicated their state did not have a specific requirement in its code, suggested universities/colleges within the state might have reading requirements as part of their approved programs for secondary teacher preparation. Thus, some states may be certifying secondary teachers with

reading education background equal to or greater than other states that require this training by law.

In several states reading requirements apply only to particular curricular or content areas. For example, six states require only English teachers to meet the requirement and one state requires both English and social studies. California, whose state code once required all content teachers to have background in reading education, now exempts the teaching fields of home economics, art, music, physical education, and industrial arts. However, examination of the data in Table I indicates a general trend toward requirements that embrace all content areas.

The span of years encompassing the inception and/or implementation or reading requirements is considerable. The earliest reported implementation date was 1967 in West Virginia; the most currently reported date for future implementation is 1984 in the state of Missouri. Nineteen seventy-six and 1978 appear to be the years which experienced the most vigorous implementation activity, as four states chose to enact their laws during those periods.

Some items on our questionnaire revealed interesting data on the initiation and/or subsequent revision of requirements in several states. California's revision has already been cited. Missouri began with a requirement affecting only English teachers, but has revised their code to specify that by 1984 teachers from *all* disciplines will be required to have completed a two-semester hour course in secondary reading. Kentucky is reportedly considering a similar revision.

As noted, we also sought to ascertain the genesis for the respective requirement(s) from all agencies contacted. The responses received were extremely varied as to their comprehensiveness and specificity. Hence, it was not possible to summarize this information in the data table. We were able, however, to sort this information into several nominal categories and chose to report the more salient findings in textual form. For instance, twelve certification agencies credited their State Board of Education for initiating the reading requirement(s), though the nature of the actual decision-making process was not explicitly stated.

Five respondents credited professional organizations and/or associations for the sole or participatory creation of the reading mandate. Specifically, professional teacher associations, English councils, and reading councils were cited for their efforts. In some states, advisory councils to the State Board of Education were credited with having played a major role in the inception of such requirements. These councils were reportedly composed of classroom teachers, school administrators, university faculty, and members of the community. Thus, it would appear that the impetus for initiating reading education requirements has generally emanated from State Boards of Education (with assistance from advisory councils) and/or from professional teacher associations and special interest/professional groups.

Specific certification requirements listed in Table I are as varied as the processes described in creating the codes. With respect to this item on our

questionnaire, some states reported specific competencies; others indicated minimum credit-hour requirements, number of courses required or both. Competencies reported ranged from precise behavioral statements to rather broad generalities such as a knowledge of the reading process.

In cases where only a course title appears in the code, states have apparently left the nature of course content (and specific competencies) to the discretion of those institutions or agencies authorized to provide the training. For example, titles reported which imply but do not specify course content include: "Teaching Developmental Reading in Secondary Schools," "Reading in the Secondary Schools," or "Teaching Reading in the Content Areas." An apparent exception to this general rule is Arizona, whose code specifies two required courses: one course in reading which includes "decoding skills," and a practicum in reading which also includes "decoding skills." In addition, Arizona appears to be the only state which *requires* a practicum experience. This is an interesting point considering the general trend toward including more field-oriented experiences in pre-service training components before completing basic secondary certification.

In states reporting college credit hours, the range was from two to six units with the mode being three. An examination of data from those agencies not specifying credit hours, but rather number of courses, revealed that most states require only one course; the maximum number required appears to be two.

Our survey suggests a relatively strong commitment by licensing agencies to the responsibility of developing reading competency through content instruction by secondary school subject-matter teachers. Some reading professionals may find the scope of this commitment, as deduced from our data, to be somewhat startling. We believe the commitment is serious enough to warrant additional types of research inquiry heretofore unreported in the professional literature. For instance, in states that have had such requirements for several years, it would be both valuable and interesting to determine the impact such legislation has had on both teaching practices and student performance in junior and senior high schools. Such inquiry may yield some insights into whether or not the actual intent of the legislation is being met. In addition, those states which are considering adopting new standards might look to others which have already enacted similar requirements. Information may be available which would help facilitate the organization and implementation processes in their respective states.

Finally, institutions charged with the responsibilities for pre-service training could profit from follow-up research on their own graduates/trainees which may lead to curricular modification in both content and methodology for required reading courses. The type of research now being conducted by Roberta Kelley in the state of Arizona may serve as an appropriate example. (Kelley, Note 1)

In short, Patberg's (1979) suggestions for further research in the validation of content reading strategies are well taken. However, the data

from our survey suggests that such research findings should perhaps interface with actual classroom practices by content teachers who have already gained competencies through pre-service course work. Results from investigations that include this additional dimension would presumably have relevance to more than just reading pedagogists.

#### REFERENCE NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Roberta Jane Kelley, a doctoral candidate at Arizona State University, is presently conducting a follow-up study to ascertain what reading strategies are actually being employed by secondary teachers from differing content areas. These teachers successfully completed required courses in content reading before being permanently certified in Arizona.

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