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THE READING CENTER: A VALUABLE IN-SERVICE RESOURCE

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As school systems across the country add reading personnel, there is an increasing need for space in individual schools where they can work with children. Older buildings are more crowded than newer ones, since ancillary personnel have increased and the older buildings cannot accommodate them. Newer buildings do have extra rooms where reading teachers can set up reading labs and resource rooms. The situation is not as crucial as it once was, however, as declining enrollments have resulted in unused classrooms which have now been assigned to reading teachers where they can work in adequate surroundings.

In addition to these reading rooms, there needs to be a central facility for the entire reading staff. This type of facility, which should be centrally located in the school district, is often referred to as a Reading Center. It should not be confused with the type of facility operating in some school systems where children go for diagnostic screening. As used in this article, the Reading Center is a place where reading teachers can meet as a staff to discuss their experiences and conduct meetings which help them keep abreast of the latest developments in the field of reading.

In the New Haven public school system, a Reading Center has been set up at the Betsy Ross Middle School. Monthly staff meetings are held for both elementary and secondary reading teachers. Because of the large staff (41 members), it is not feasible to meet as a total group, although occasionally meetings of the entire staff are held there.

The meetings held for reading personnel should be varied and planned carefully. Sales representatives can visit occasionally to display and discuss new materials and programs. Reading teachers can demonstrate some successful programs and approaches they have been using. Various school personnel i.e., Superintendent of Schools, Director of Curriculum can also be invited to discuss the reading program and exchange information with the staff. Members of the Board of Education as well as members of the community can also be invited to attend a reading staff meeting.

One technique the author has used successfully with his staff is to assign a journal article from a recent issue to a reading teacher who summarizes its contents. This keeps the staff aware of current issues in the reading world and often leads to a lively exchange of ideas.

The Reading Center is also a depository for books, kits and reading materials. Both classroom teachers and reading teachers visit the Reading Center and borrow the materials for use in the schools. They sign for the materials and are allowed to keep them for an unspecified period of time. All materials are returned to the Center at the end of the school year.

Professional books and magazines are also available at the Reading Center for teachers who are enrolled in graduate courses or engaged in independent research to use. There is also a Reserve Shelf which has single copies of the latest basal series. These materials do not circulate. Additionally, the Reading Center has an extensive file of the latest publishers' catalogues which are used frequently by principals and reading teachers when ordering materials. This file of catalogues is kept up-to-date so that current prices can be quoted.

More than a meeting place, the Reading Center also produces materials for the in-service development of both reading and classroom teachers. This material is written by staff members and published by the New Haven Reading Department. These materials consist of booklets, pamphlets, bulletins, brochures, etc. which are distributed to New Haven's 1,200 teachers. The following types of materials are available:

1. Questions Parents Ask About Reading
2. Enrichment Ideas in Reading
3. Guide to the Secondary Reading Program
4. Guidebook to Tutorial Programs in Reading
5. 120 Ideas to Motivate Reluctant Readers
6. Reading Readiness Activities
7. Reading Recipes for Parents
8. Homework Resource Activities Booklet
9. How You Can Help Your Child in Reading

These materials are popular because they offer specific, concrete ideas for skills development. Many of the titles need to be reprinted annually.

Several members of the Reading Department have been successful, on a competitive basis, in securing Title II Right to Read "mini grants" for reading. These grants carry a stipend of \$1,500 and are awarded by writing an acceptable proposal dealing with creative ways to motivate youngsters to read through a variety of media and subject-matter disciplines.

Reading staff members, who are also recipients of these grants, are now working on producing a filmstrip at the Reading Center which describes the content and conduct of each grant, highlighting its creative elements. The voice of the reading specialist is synchronized with the filmstrip. This filmstrip will be shown to PTA groups as a public relations effort and school staffs so that these elements can hopefully be incorporated into many classroom reading programs.

Workshops are also held at the Reading Center. New materials are displayed and discussed. Additionally, make-it-and-take-it workshops are held where various reading games and learning devices are exhibited and explained. Materials such as construction paper, tagboard, glue, and newsprint are then provided for the teachers to make these devices and take back with them for use with the children in the schools.

Every school system should have a Reading Center, as it serves a real need. Surprisingly, many school systems do not have such a facility. In addition to providing a home for reading personnel which establishes a feeling of group-identity, it produces materials and conducts activities which foster professional growth and in-service development.