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# READING RESEARCH AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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Research in reading has been voluminous over the years. Whether research has been conducted to satisfy one's doctoral requirements or whether it has been done by university or school personnel to prove or disprove an educational theory, a portion of the research studies done can be disclaimed for three simple reasons: (1) the hypothesis or premise under which the study was launched has been shabbily conceived, (2) the problem was not clearly defined, and (3) research results cannot be replicated or stand up against rigorous examination because of faulty research design.

Research in reading instruction or any other area for that matter can be considered "solid" or "sound" when it presents another concern which leads to a key question: "How much of this research gets translated into actual classroom practice?" As a supervisor who works with classroom teachers daily, I can respond by saying "very little." This is unfortunate, because if reading instruction is to be effective, teachers must keep abreast of current developments in the field and change classroom procedures whenever sound research warrants it.

The emphasis for the schools should be on curriculum particularly the reading curriculum for in the long run it is the curriculum that will improve academic achievement of students and help a school system mobilize for excellence. Yet so many school systems get bogged down in such issues as discipline and vandalism. These issues, of course, must be considered but they do prevent the schools from devoting more attention to matters related to the curriculum.

The New Haven public school systems has made communication concerning its curriculum a top priority. Every third Monday of the month has been designated as Curriculum Monday. School faculties meet to discuss only matters regarding the curriculum, especially the reading curriculum so that teachers and administrators are kept abreast of current developments. Additionally, citywide Curriculum Meetings have been held in various school locations so that parents can ask questions about all phases of the curriculum.

Organizations such as the NCTE and IRA have published a great deal of useful information with sound research behind it in their journals and other professional material. Indeed, many journals devoted to reading/language arts instruction have for years devoted portions of their issues to synopses of current studies. No one can say definitely what the impact has been. It is my hope that the impact has been tremendous, but I am realistic enough to think that the impact has been moderate at best.

How can administrators, classroom teachers and reading personnel — people who deal with children every day — be encouraged to use research results in tangible ways to upgrade reading programs where it counts — in the classroom? Six modest proposals for achieving this worthwhile goal follow:

1. Principals, supervisors, and reading and classroom teachers who conduct significant research, whether it is an individual enterprise or done in conjunction with graduate study, should be encouraged, or even required, to share research results as part of the school system's staff development program.
2. Part of each school system's Superintendent's Bulletin or Newsletter should be devoted to sharing in specific and clear language research studies which have implications for upgrading instruction.
3. Principals and/or supervisors should ask staff members to report, as part of a staff or faculty meeting, on a research article or one describing a promising practice found in such journals as *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Reading*, *Reading World*, *The Journal of Educational Research*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Research in the Teaching of English* or *Reading Horizons*.
4. If school systems defray the cost for staff members to attend conventions, institutes and other meetings which disseminate current research findings, participants should be asked to write a *concise* report or review on current developments for distribution throughout the school system.
5. Boards of Education should allocate funds for research. Additionally, they should hire a Director of Research and Planning (How many school systems have done so?) who can be instrumental in identifying problems in reading in need of further study, initiating the needed study and disseminating the results. This is a viable idea because it can also pinpoint areas in which money is being spent which are not yielding good results. In essence, this will eliminate waste in already-tight school budgets.
6. School personnel and college personnel can work together in launching needed research. College resources and facilities, i.e., Computer Centers, Data Processing Labs and so on can be used in treating the statistical data compiled. As a Supervisor, I have met with graduate advisors at a local college with suggestions of topics in reading in need research which they could recommend to their advisees for possible theses topics. Results will be shared with local school personnel.

#### Concluding Remarks

An effective reading program is one which embodies sound research. Since research is an ongoing process, it is incumbent upon school personnel to keep abreast of current research and incorporate the latest research findings in the instructional program. The line between research and classroom practice tends to be too distinct. Proposals outlined in this ar-

ticle, if accepted and acted upon, can make a difference between a quality program and one that is only mediocre. Isn't that reason enough to consider them carefully?

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