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Elenor E. Francis

Mary L. Rearick

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Looking at the Role of the Reading Specialist from the Perspective of Supporting Adolescent Literacy

BY ELENOR E. FRANCIS & MARY L. REARICK

Introduction

Since 2001 and the implementation of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation, greater emphasis has been placed on reading and reading instruction. Few would disagree that reading is central to learning. As students progress into middle and high school, it is generally accepted that they have learned to read and are reading to learn (Valencia & Buly, 2004). However, for a variety of reasons, the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school is difficult for a growing number of students; many of whom end up struggling with content area reading expectations (International Reading Association [IRA], 2006). Researchers have found that students who struggle with reading after third grade often continue to read poorly in high school and as Biancarosa and Snow (2006) pointed out: "...will falter or fail in later-grade academic tasks if teaching of reading is neglected in middle and secondary grades" (p 1).

This article will explore how the role of the reading specialist is evolving beyond the primary grades. It will examine how the role of reading specialist has changed over time, how teachers and administrators view the role of such specialists, the emergent changes in the work of that specialist, and ways in which reading specialists and classroom teachers can work together to meet the challenges of struggling adolescent readers.

"Reading Specialist" Defined

The position of reading specialist is a position that has been evolving slowly for decades. To many in the educational field the reading specialist is someone who has earned an advanced degree in reading and been trained to work with struggling students in grades K-12. Until recently, reading specialists have been identified as individuals who were mostly involved with implementing an intervention program for students who were at risk and reading

significantly below their grade level. In the last few decades the role and responsibilities of the reading specialist have become more complex. Quatroche, Bean and Hamilton (2001) defined reading specialist as "A specially prepared professional who has responsibility (e.g., providing instruction, serving as a resource to teachers) for literacy performance of readers in general or struggling readers in particular" (p. 282). While reading specialists are trained to work with students at all grade levels, the majority work with students at the elementary level (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton & Wallis, 2002).

Some of the literature suggests, however, that the work of the reading specialist needs to reach beyond the elementary school and into the middle and secondary school grade levels. Protheroe (2003) points out that "Teachers in grades through high school continue to deal with students' reading problems, even after they have received high-quality reading instruction in the early grades." (p. 44). In response

Elenor "Casey" Francis recently completed her master's degree in reading at Eastern Michigan University and is currently a high school teacher/mentor at Eastern Washtenaw Multicultural Academy, Ann Arbor, MI. (eeFrancis@sbc-global.net).

Dr. Mary L. Rearick is an associate professor and graduate reading coordinator in the College of Education Reading Program Area at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI. (mary.rearick@emich.edu)

They welcome your comments and questions regarding the preparation of literacy coaches and reading specialists.

to the growing need to support adolescent learners, the IRA released a position statement (2002) which emphasized that at the middle and secondary levels, the reading specialist must also be able to "... work with content area teachers to assist them in building a better understanding of the relevance of reading to their discipline, how to use their textbooks effectively, and how to implement effective literary strategies" (p. 2) resulting in expanding the role and responsibilities of the reading specialist. If struggling adolescent readers are going to succeed it is essential that teachers, reading professionals, administrators, and district supervisors come together to support the literacy development of all students. Yet, regrettably, as Quatroche, et al., (2001) reported, "only 26% of the schools in the U.S. have certified reading specialists" (p. 289).

History

The first reading teachers:

Historically, our first reading instructors were our elementary teachers. Prior to the 1930s they were also our only reading instructors. Vogt and Shearer (2007) provided an excellent overview in which they explored the evolution of reading instruction in the United States beginning with the early 17th century and continuing into present day approaches to teaching reading and supporting the literacy development of today's adolescents. They point out that religious belief provided the framework for early reading instruction. Prior to the 19th century, reading instruction focused primarily upon the alphabet, memorization and recitation of Bible verses, and elocution. During the mid 1800s, a series of six McGuffey Readers were introduced. . They focused on the alphabet and phonics with each successive reader becoming more complex. Readers three through six were designed for the older children, the equivalent of today's middle and high school students. By the turn of the century, reading instruction began to focus on reading for information and commerce as industry was demanding a more educated workforce. Additionally, by the end of the 19th century, large numbers of immigrants were arriving in the United States, and more immigrant children were entering schools, most of whom could not read or write English (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). It was the classroom teacher who was responsible for all educational instruction during this time.

The emergence of the reading specialist, 1930-1960:

Specific teachers of reading emerged during the 1930s. Those first reading specialists functioned primarily as supervisors who oversaw reading instruction and worked to improve reading programs. They did not have direct interaction with students. Only after World War II, when it became evident that students were leaving elementary schools lacking appropriate reading skills did the role of the reading specialist evolve from supervisor to that of remedial reading instructor. This role expanded quickly and was maintained through external funding, administrative support, public insistence, and governmental intervention. As remedial reading teachers, reading specialists worked directly with students who were experiencing difficulty in learning to read. Remediation seemed to be the path of the reading specialist through the 1960s (Bean, 2004, p.2).

Title I and pull-out programming, 1960-1970:

The socially and politically tumultuous times of the late 1950s and 1960s brought about a renewed interest in improving public education for all students. In 1965, the federal government passed Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This act, the predecessor to today's "No Child Left Behind" legislation, was passed to address the issue of inequality in schools. Title I targeted a disparity in education that was resulting in an achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers. Title I funds enabled identified school districts the opportunity to provide a myriad of services, which included hiring of reading specialists. According to the terms of Title I, funds were only available to students who met certain requirements. As a result, these students were pulled-out of the regular classroom for individualized instruction with a reading specialist (Bean, 2004). While reading specialists still fulfilled the role of remedial teacher, it was around this time that a number of reading professionals began to see ways in which their role could be expanded to encompass more than instruction to one that also included acting as a resource for others (i.e., acting as a consultant) (Bean).

Studies done during the 1960s and 1970s were beginning to show that children who were pulled-out of the regular classroom for remedial instruction

were experiencing difficulty when they returned to the classroom and that classroom teachers also found the process disruptive (Bean, Swan & Knaub, 2003). According to researchers, children who participated in pull-out programs often were unable to do or understand the work being done in the classroom when they returned because it bore little resemblance to the strategies they were learning and activities they were doing in the pull-out programs (Bean et al., 2002). It was the same for all students, whether the pull-out programs were taking place at the elementary, middle, or high school level. According to a study of one secondary reading teacher's attempt to work with a classroom teacher to further support one of his pull-out students, he was told that it was not the classroom teachers' job but his to provide the support to this student. Weiss (1975) suggested this was not an unusual scenario and used it to demonstrate how little interaction was taking place between the reading specialist and classroom teachers (p. 174). Bean (2004) observed that: "Some reading specialists were not knowledgeable about the instruction students were receiving in the classrooms ..., nor did they share what they were doing with the classroom teachers" (p. 3). As a result, when it was time to reauthorize the Title I legislation, authorities suggested that reading specialists begin to work more collaboratively with classroom teachers, in the classroom (Bean, 2004, p. 5). Weiss (1975) had suggested this earlier when he stated "the reading teacher cannot be someone locked into a laboratory with all of his or her valuable knowledge reaching only a few. This person is the catalyst who can help a total faculty improve instruction for all students" (p. 178).

New role being defined, 1980-1990

By 1980, the role of reading specialist had begun to take on a variety of new responsibilities, which included working more collaboratively with classroom teachers. As Vogt and Shearer (2007) pointed out, "Five distinct roles for the reading specialist were listed in 1986 by the International Reading Association (IRA): diagnostic/remedial specialist; developmental/reading/study skills specialist; reading consultant/reading resource teacher; reading coordinator/supervisor; and reading professor" (p. 20). Research in the early 1990s concluded that the pull-out programs appeared to disrupt rather than enhance instruction for struggling readers. At this time the effectiveness of Title I and whether or not

the federally funded program was actually impacting the achievement gap and supporting at risk students came under closer scrutiny which resulted in a downsizing or elimination of reading specialist positions (Vogt & Shearer, p. 20). This reduction in positions for reading specialists occurred even as the achievement gap continued to expand.

Reading Specialist's Current Role

By the late 1990s, concerned by reports of low reading achievement and discouraged by the trend to eliminate reading specialist positions, the IRA formed a commission to review and summarize the literature on the role of the reading specialist. Focusing on research published after 1990, members of the commission, Quatroche, et al., (2001) found that the responsibilities assumed by the reading specialists differed a great deal depending on context, the school, administration or social strata involved. Additionally, the studies they reviewed showed that the way in which reading specialists were perceived by others varied by profession and setting. For example, classroom teachers and administrators viewed the role of the reading specialist differently than specialists viewed themselves. Where reading specialists saw themselves as "individuals who provide specialized instruction, administer formal assessments, and communicate with teachers and parents" (Quatroche, et al, 2001, p. 288) the classroom teachers viewed them as a resource person who could support their work in the classroom and help them plan instruction. They also stated that middle and secondary classroom teachers viewed the role and responsibilities of the reading specialist differently than teachers at the elementary level (Quatroche, et al., 2001). Their research further revealed that high school principals primarily associated the responsibilities of the reading specialist with that of support personnel who worked with content teachers on the one hand and who would assume the responsibility for assessment and instruction of struggling readers on the other. According to Lapp, Fisher, Flood, and Frey (2003), teachers and administrators in an urban setting view the reading specialist from yet another perspective. These three authors, focusing their study on an urban high school in which 100% of the students received free or reduced-priced lunch, found that the reading specialist was seen by the majority of the educators as an essential member

of the faculty who provided a positive impact on the entire climate of the school.

As participants in a project to devise and put into action a university- and school-based partnership with three different urban San Diego schools (an elementary, middle and high school) Lapp, et al., (2003) examined the role of the reading specialist. In their article they discussed what they termed the dual role of the reading specialist (p. 1)—as mentor or coach to teachers and paraprofessionals and as tutor doing one-on-one instruction with students. They found that the reading specialist tutored students as well as conducted observations and modeled and demonstrated lessons for colleagues in the classroom. Reading specialists were also responsible for providing ongoing staff and professional development opportunities.

The reading specialist was most often responsible for facilitating or coordinating these learning symposiums (Lapp, et al., 2003). One conclusion they reached was that the school's ability to raise 9th grade reading scores was in part the result of the support provided by a full-time reading specialist.

Based upon their review, Quatroche, et al. (2001) concluded that while the principal role of the reading specialist continued to be that of instruction and assessment, the way in which reading specialists carried out their responsibilities had changed. One change occurred as criticism of pull-out programs increased. The result was that the reading specialists moved into the classroom to work with students. Overall, the reading specialist has had to adapt to a myriad of factors that have impacted what they do. Factors include school policies, state policies, accessibility to supportive programs and partnerships, governmental funding, and federal legislation. Similarly, Bean, et al., (2002) showed how literacy instruction has had to adapt to such varying conditions as students' widely different literacy backgrounds, availability of material, and the different instructional practices within the classroom. At the middle and high school level, the availability of materials, literacy experiences and background of the students most certainly impact what is expected of a reading specialist because there is the potential for such a wide spectrum of literacy levels to be spread across the content area classroom

Overall, the reading specialist has had to adapt to a myriad of factors that have impacted what they do.

(Moore, 1969; IRA, 2006). Taking all of this into consideration, Quatroche, et al. (2001) concluded that regardless of grade level the "reading specialists' roles (see Appendix A on page 17) may include six major responsibilities: instruction, assessment, leadership, resource/consultant, collaborator and student advocate" (p. 291).

The literature that followed the work of Quatroche, et al., (2001) began to inquire about the ways in which reading specialists fulfilled their responsibilities. Bean et al., (2002) conducted a national survey of reading professionals to discover what reading specialists were doing to provide literacy support to students and teachers alike. The results provide greater insight about the direction the reading specialist's role has taken in the last few decades,

what is expected of reading professionals, and the ways in which they are meeting those expectations to support literacy for all students.

These findings were that reading specialists were primarily white females who worked in a single school, primarily suburban—with only a few respondents from rural or urban areas. The majority of the respondents stated they were full-time reading specialists, and all had classroom teaching experience prior to becoming a reading specialist. Most often they worked at the primary or intermediate levels as classroom teachers. Very few who responded to the survey stated they worked in a middle school (16%) or high school (8%) settings. A similar, but smaller in-depth study of eight reading professionals reported similar demographic findings (Mallozzi & Laine, 2006).

In analyzing the survey responses, both studies identified the major areas of responsibility for reading specialists to be instruction, assessment, and serve as a resource for teachers and other school personnel. Additionally, respondents in the Bean et al (2002) survey identified administrative duties as not only their least liked responsibility but also one they viewed as taking away from their ability to provide reading support. Little of the literature to this point has discussed the administrative role of the reading specialist, even though Title I requires forms be completed to demonstrate compliance with the program guidelines.

Instructionally, reading specialists continued to work with students both in and out of the classroom. Many of the respondents in both surveys expressed that each method of working with students, within the classroom or in pull-out programs, had advantages and disadvantages. According to the specialists who responded, instruction was most often conducted in small groups and focused upon individual instructional needs rather than on developing instruction to support an entire class (Bean et al, 2002; Mallozzi & Laine, 2006). Both studies also determined that assessment was one area in which their job responsibilities had changed, stating that it now demanded more of their time. The increased time spent on assessment was for purposes of decision-making and accountability (Bean et al, 2002; Mallozzi & Laine, 2006). Mallozzi and Laine (2006) further noted that "As students' needs change, so does the role of the reading specialist" (p. 11). In the end, Bean et al (2002) concluded that "... the primary role of the reading specialist is the same—working with students with reading difficulties. However, the ways in which they perform that role has changed" (p. 742). This conclusion was supported by principals who participated in a later study conducted by Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003) when they stated that "reading specialists performed a multitude of tasks that ranged from working with students to performing leadership roles in the schools" (p. 447).

Bean, et al. (2003) were interested in better understanding the leadership roles of the reading specialist and how they performed those roles in schools that had been identified as having exemplary reading programs. In the first phase of their study, the researchers used a survey and contacted school principals to determine how they perceived the specialist as fulfilling their role. Of the schools with reading specialists, 97% of the principals who responded stated that the specialists were either important or very important to the reading programs. In the second phase of their study, the researchers contacted 12 specialists directly to obtain a more complete picture of how they contributed to the success of the reading programs in these schools. The demographic make up of these reading specialists were similar to those previously reported by Bean et al., (2002) and Mallozzi and Laine (2006). Their self-reported responsibilities included not only instructional and diagnostic responsibilities, but that they were also responsible for acting as a resource to

teachers and as a school and community liaison (p. 449). Bean, et al. (2003) concluded that "The position of reading specialist is one that requires an educator with multiple talents—one who can work with children and at the same time emerge as a leader, working collaboratively with colleagues to improve education for all students" (p. 453).

The literature has also examined the research on schools with and without exemplary reading programs. One finding in the research is that effective reading programs tend to have one thing in common—a trained reading professional. In 1969, after examining various reading programs implemented in middle and high school classes nationwide, Early stated that studies found marked improvement when reading specialists worked with the teachers to incorporate reading instruction into the classroom. A report from the Alliance for Excellent Education made a similar observation,

Throughout the nation, many secondary schools and school districts are beginning to implement valuable programs designed to improve adolescent literacy. These programs recognize that effective, continuing, and supportive staff development—for teachers, administrators, and key district-level personnel is critical to success. (Sturtevant, 2003, p.1)

Where the study conducted by Bean, et al. (2003) examined the role of the reading specialist in schools with exemplary reading programs, Tatum (2004) set out to share his experiences as a reading specialist in a school that did not, initially, have an exemplary program (p. 29). Tatum was hired to implement a literacy framework for grades 4-8 in an urban middle school in which 95% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Through observation of and interaction with the teachers, Tatum determined that to be successful he needed to get the teachers to view their literacy instruction from a different perspective. He addressed teacher concerns, provided regular and specific feedback, and incorporated literature into the curriculum that met the specific needs of the student population. Reiterating what other reading researchers have determined, Tatum concluded that reading specialists, whether employed in a school that has performed well or are hired to work in schools that are without exemplary reading programs, must "...be resources to teachers, work effectively with allied professionals and

parents, have solid knowledge about instructional practices, have familiarity with multiple forms of assessment, provide diagnostic teaching, and be able to work with students" (p. 37).

Reading Specialist as Reading Coach

In the wake of the research of Quatroche et al (2001), Bean et al (2002) and others, much of the literature began to explore what Henwood (2000) referred to as the new role of the reading specialist and Dole (2004) called the changing role of the reading specialist to that of literacy or reading coach. Henwood, a high school reading specialist, was approached by her principal to help him develop a more collaborative environment among the content area teachers. At the time, Henwood stated, "there was nothing in the literature about such a role for a reading specialist at the high school level; I had to function in this new role while at the same time creating it" (p.317). Henwood found that to be successful she needed to partner with, not try to act as an expert to her colleagues. She stated that the position that emerged was one of collaboration—one in which she was able to work with content area teachers, special education teachers, school librarians, school counselors, and administrators as they all worked together to support "the overall literacy development of students" (Henwood, 2000, p. 322). She concluded that her collaborative efforts had had a positive impact on both teacher and student learning. Teachers cited growth in their pedagogy as they came to understand that "reading meant more than skills and comprehension and that it encompassed communication, learning styles, and the learning process" (p.322).

As recently as 2004, Dole stated that there was little research on reading coaches and their responsibilities and noted that the reading specialist is in an excellent position to assume the role of reading coach as they have the training and knowledge base to support not only students but teachers as well. According to Dole, the reading specialist is able to provide a rationale or theory behind the instruction and guide teachers to be more reflective about their own pedagogy. In her evaluation of the role of reading specialist as reading coach, Dole provided a number of scenarios in which the reading specialist acted as reading coach and provided opportunities for teachers to learn not only from the coach but from each other as well by seeing lessons modeled and demonstrated for them.

Dole concluded that as educational demands have increased, the role of reading specialist as coach can be an effective tool in supporting both students and teachers. In schools where there are large numbers of students who struggle with reading, Dole suggested that reading specialists can play an important role in supporting teachers as they provide reading instruction in their classrooms (Dole, 2004) by helping teachers take ownership of and implement new strategies and techniques into their curriculums. Dole (2004) was not the only researcher who suggested that reading specialists could and do play an important role in the classroom. Quatroche et al. (2001) also found that

... programs that have professionals with the strongest backgrounds in teaching of reading have the highest success rates. Therefore it appears critical that professionals with extensive knowledge of reading instruction be part of every classroom where there are students who need help learning to read. (p. 289)

As the role of literacy or reading coach began to appear in the literature, some researchers claimed the literature was somewhat confusing and contradictory regarding the role and qualifications of reading professionals. An article in *Reading Today* (2004) acknowledged that the role of reading/literacy coach was gaining a great deal of attention and that it had become more widely used as a means of helping to raise students' reading skills. However, the article also raised the question of the coach's qualifications and expressed concern over the hiring of individuals as coaches who have little or no training or expertise in reading, stating:

Where coaching was once seen as one role of the certified reading specialist, today there is ample anecdotal evidence that people are being dubbed coaches who range from specialists to librarians to biology teachers—virtually anyone including people who have never taught reading in any way (IRA, 2004a, p. 18).

In an attempt to reduce the confusion described by the *Reading Today* article and in response to the criticism, Dole, Liang, Watkins, and Wiggins (2006), set out to gain a better understanding of the different job titles used for reading professionals, the requirements for becoming a reading professional

and the types of roles and duties of these reading professionals. Dole et al (2006) determined that one reason for the confusion stemmed from the fact that each state set its own requirements for becoming a reading professional and might or might not adhere to the guidelines established by the IRA.

Using IRA definitions to categorize their data, Dole et al (2006) suggested that there are three job titles most often used to refer to the reading professional: reading teacher, reading specialist, and reading coach. The responsibilities differ in accord with the job title of the reading professional, but requirements for the various positions at times have overlapped. They further ascertained that while the job requirements for reading specialists and reading coaches were similar, their job descriptions differed (p. 197). According to Dole et al. (2006) reading teachers primarily taught reading instruction; reading specialists spent most of their time working on instruction with students but were also responsible for assessment, acting as a resource and collaborating with colleagues to promote professional growth. With regards to reading coaches, the researchers concluded that coaches were mostly responsible for working with adults in ways that supported professional development. This point is supported by the standards for middle and high school literacy coaches that stated "A literacy coach working at any grade level is more concerned with teachers' learning and growth than with students' learning and growth" (IRA, 2006, p. 43).

An inference one might make based upon the literature, however, is that as the role of reading specialist has moved from direct instruction toward one of instructional leader and staff developer, reading specialists have also begun to function as reading/literacy coaches. An additional inference could also be made that while all reading specialist are reading/literacy coaches, not all reading/literacy coaches are reading specialists.

In 2005, Shaw, Smith, Chesler, and Romeo underscored the reading specialist's importance as literacy coach stating: "They must now use their knowledge and performance skills to make a school-wide impact by demonstrating lessons and communicating and collaborating with classroom teachers and

paraprofessionals" (p. 6). Yet, as evidenced by the position statement of the IRA 2004, not all reading coaches are reading specialists. In those instances, the IRA recommends that "reading specialists should supervise reading coaches who do not have reading specialist certification" (IRA, 2004b, p. 2). While the research is still emerging regarding reading/literacy coaches and their roles and qualifications, schools are employing reading/literacy coaches at all educational levels as a means of supporting literacy instruction.

Shaw et al (2005) understood the role of reading specialist as literacy coach to mean collaborating with teachers in ways that provided them with new knowledge regarding best practices and ways to implement those practices into the classroom. To Shaw et al, this meant assisting with assessment, demonstrating lessons, and using various formats

to provide professional development, with a great deal of emphasis on the role of providing professional development. Both the IRA standards (2006) for middle and secondary literacy coaches and Sturtevant (2003) emphasized the need for literacy coaches to offer not only a strong literacy foundation regarding theory and practice, but also a familiarity with secondary students and their culture as well as with the various issues faced by the content area teachers. Essentially, the reading/literacy coach must know how to work with adults as well as children. Sturtevant (2003) emphasized that at the middle or secondary level,

Literacy coaches may work directly with students who have particular difficulties in reading and comprehension, but their major role is to work with content teachers across the curriculum to help them implement and utilize strategies designed to improve their students' ability to read, write, and succeed in content courses. (p. 1)

To gain a new perspective on how reading professionals can provide ongoing professional development support for colleagues, Sturtevant and Linek (2007) looked closely at the Secondary Education Activity (SEA) project, an international project in which a collaboration of reading professionals designed a

Essentially, the reading/literacy coach must know how to work with adults as well as children

professional development program in which teachers learned to coach other teachers. Through the use of governmental funding, this program was developed and implemented by members of the American Institute for Research and the IRA. The purpose of the study was to examine the concept of teachers working with their colleagues to promote professional development at the secondary level. The goal was to develop ways in which teachers could learn new ways to engage adolescent learners in higher order thinking and problem-solving skills, and then return to their schools and districts and coach their colleagues on the new techniques. Sturtevant and Linek (2007) concluded that there is value to be found in "working with high school classroom teachers to develop expertise in literacy, and depending on them to help in furthering school improvement and student learning" (p. 250). Today reading specialists often work with content area teachers to implement and apprenticeship approach to help middle and secondary level students acquire the comprehension and academic literacy strategies that they need to read complex materials (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001, Tovani, 2000).

As illustrated by this study, the reading specialist as reading/literacy coach is perhaps the latest way in which reading specialists and classroom teachers can work together to improve the literacy skills of struggling adolescent learners. Sturtevant (2003) stated

A curriculum to support secondary learning and literacy cannot be a rigid, one-size-fits-all program. Teachers and teams of teachers must be able to make professional, informed decisions based on their own students' needs and ability levels, in relation to curricular requirements and context. To do this, teachers must be guided and supported in a continuous learning process about effective ways to combine their teaching of literacy and content in the secondary environment. (p. 1)

The literature has clearly shown that where there are effective reading programs there are also knowledgeable reading professionals who can design intervention programs for students at risk of failure and who can collaborate with colleagues to see that all children become literate (Blackford, 2002/2008; Grigg, Donahue, & Dion, 2007). Reading specialists are as, Dole et al (2004) stated, in the best position

to step into the role of reading/literacy coach and to provide the content area teachers with the support and guidance recommended by Sturtevant (2003).

Conclusion

Historically, research has suggested ways in which content area teachers can and should incorporate literacy into their classrooms. Fay (1964) noted that "improvement of pupils' reading can best be achieved where the teacher actively attempts to increase his own professional effectiveness through experimentation" (p. 164). The literature, however, has also revealed that at the middle and secondary levels, teachers stated that they either did not see it as their responsibility to teach reading or that they believed they lacked the appropriate skills to provide literacy instruction to those students who needed the help the most (Clary, Oglan, & Stysliger, 2008). The literature suggests that the answer to who is in the best position to help the content area teachers the most is the reading specialist. As suggested by Shaw et al (2005), the role of reading specialist as literacy coach is to collaborate with teachers in ways that provide them with new knowledge regarding best practices and ways to implement those practices into the classroom. The reading specialist of the 21st century not only works with struggling readers, but also provides teachers the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices into their classroom (IRA, 2003).

In reviewing the literature, it is evident that the IRA has been influential in defining the role of the reading specialist and that they are proactively working to establish clear and concise requirements and guidelines for the reading/literacy coach. According to the standards of the IRA, the reading specialist must be prepared to fulfill the role of reading intervention teacher, reading/literacy coach, and reading supervisor or coordinator (IRA, 2003).

As the literature has shown, the role and responsibilities of the reading specialist are diverse and complex. It is a position that has changed over time and appears to be impacted by a variety of variables and factors, the least of which is the educational environment in which the reading specialist works. How reading specialists are viewed is associated with the position of the individuals with whom they are interacting. Most of the research appears to be qualitative rather than quantitative, based upon observation, questionnaires, and surveys completed

by self-identified reading professionals. While there is a great deal of literature that examines how reading specialists function, the majority of it focuses on the reading specialist working in primary and intermediate grades. Many researchers admitted that there was little research that examined the role of the reading specialist in middle and secondary schools and recommended more research in this area was needed. One reason there are so few studies examining the role of the reading specialist in middle and secondary grades may well be that so few middle and secondary positions for reading specialists exist. Clearly, funding of programs has historically placed greater emphasis on early literacy development. However, this may be changing as the role of the reading specialist heads more towards the direction of reading/literacy coach and more attention is placed on adolescent literacy.

This is not the first time that the role of the reading specialist has had to adapt to accommodate the changing needs of students or the whims of legislators and it is unlikely that it will be the last. While the role of reading specialist may be complex and diverse, it is also one that is flexible; continuously evolving as it strives to meet the needs of the time. The one constant is that, regardless of grade level, the reading specialist will continue to provide students and teachers with support that will enhance literacy and work towards improving the quality of a school's reading program.

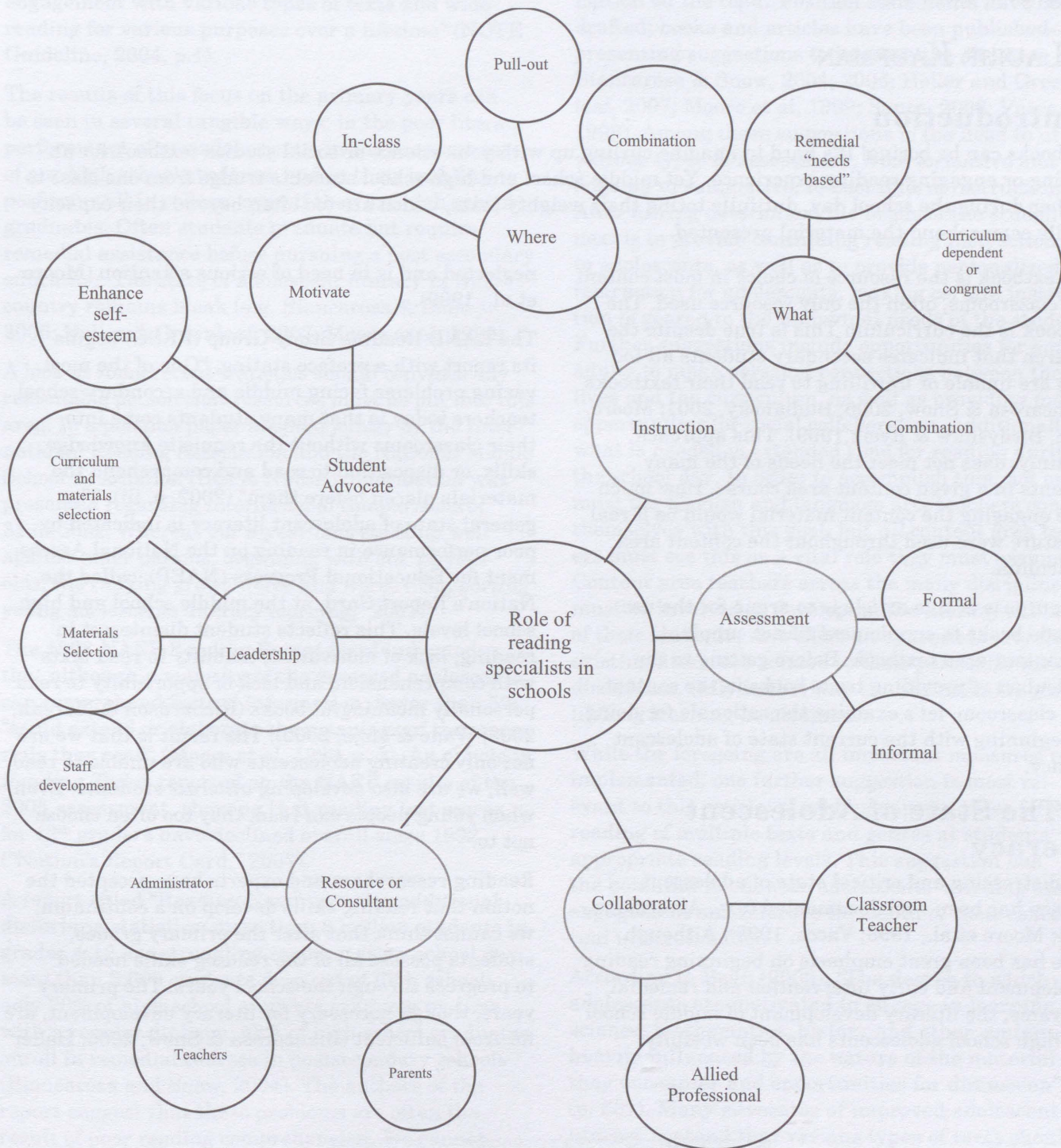
Note: While the fields of special education and English as a second language have produced a rich literature base on assisting adolescent special needs students mainstreamed into the regular classroom and those students who are English Language learners, these populations are beyond the scope of this review.

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Appendix A Roles and Responsibilities of Reading Specialists



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