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Michigan Reading Association

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# Guidelines for the Professional Development of Reading Paraprofessionals

Michigan Reading Association, 1992

## FOREWORD

This document represents the position of the Michigan Reading Association (MRA) regarding the knowledge, experiences, and professional development goals that support quality reading instruction provided by reading paraprofessionals in the State of Michigan.

The MRA is a professional organization concerned with the promotion of literacy. One primary means to achieve this goal is to strive to improve the quality of reading instruction provided in our schools. This would include supporting the preparation and professional development of reading paraprofessionals who assist teachers in providing reading instruction/support to those students who are enrolled in reading programs such as Chapter 1, Article III, etc.

The following set of standards promotes preparation and professional development of reading paraprofessionals who can use their knowledge flexibly to help students learn to read.

Michigan Reading Association defines reading as "**the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation.**" This same philosophy is the basis for the Michigan State Board of Education's Essential Goals and Objectives for Reading Education and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program Reading Test. Reading paraprofessionals who work with students would have this philosophy guide them as they interact with students in a reading program.

The Michigan Reading Association's position on preparation and professional development of reading paraprofessionals is based on three critical premises:

1. Reading instruction is a dynamic interaction between a teacher, a reading paraprofessional, and a student, designed to help the student develop the knowledge, strategies and attitudes of proficient readers. The nature of this instructional interaction depends on the teacher's, reading paraprofessional's and the student's knowledge, and the instructional context.
2. Reading is one of four communication processes that also include writing, listening and speaking. Learning and instruction in these forms of communication are strongly interrelated and mutually facilitating. Since communication involves both critical and creative thought, instruction necessarily involves the development of thinking skills. Also, since communication may involve content area knowledge, independent learning strategies and reading instruction need to be developed in all content area instruction.



3. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is the development of independent, strategic, motivated readers who view reading as a lifelong pursuit.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of the reading paraprofessional is to supplement the reading and language arts instructional program for identified students under the direction of a teacher (e.g., Chapter 1, classroom, reading specialist).

MRA acknowledges that reading paraprofessionals at an entry level, without any formal training, may not possess knowledge of instructional strategies and the reading process. The knowledge level of the paraprofessional is something to be aimed for through ongoing professional development. An increased level of knowledge will assist paraprofessionals in becoming more adept when reinforcing instruction and using instructional strategies under the direction of the teacher.

At an entry level, paraprofessionals might be expected to follow modified guided practice procedures after having the opportunity to observe a teacher model, practicing with students and receiving teacher feedback. Paraprofessionals, as they gain competency with training, can be expected to follow up on teacher instruction. This might involve modeling strategies and techniques which the teacher has already presented, such as pre-teaching, reteaching, and/or administering tests under direction of the teacher.

The necessity for providing paraprofessionals with a means for acquiring knowledge in the field of reading and language arts might lead districts to consider different options.

Training could be received through observing the teacher in the classroom, watching and discussing instructional videos, planning sessions with the teacher, specially designed local workshops, training sessions with a reading teacher, Chapter 1 workshops, MRA conferences, and staff development inservices.

One implication for ensuring professional development is that funding needs to be provided by the local school district. A second implication is that some districts might want to institute a separate job classification for trained reading paraprofessionals (instructional aides, instructional assistants) rather than "teacher aides."

The following guidelines are recommended as a means to assist school agencies, organizations, and/or interested individuals in providing a model for the ongoing professional development of reading paraprofessionals. MRA hopes that, by improving the knowledge of reading paraprofessionals, students in the State of Michigan will be the ultimate beneficiaries.

Reading paraprofessionals just entering that role may or may not have the necessary knowledge specified in this document. In addition to expanding their knowledge base, reading paraprofessionals will also need to continue to develop the flexible and efficient use of this knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge and procedures included may provide a guideline for a continuous process of professional growth and development.

The MRA recommends that this document be used by reading paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, reading organizations, and other interested individuals and agencies to help develop a plan for the professional development of reading paraprofessionals and/or as a guideline for hiring prospective reading paraprofessionals.



## MRA READING PARAPROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

### I. PROVIDING SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTION

#### A. ASSISTING IN SHOWING STUDENTS HOW TO BUILD MEANING BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER READING

1. With teacher direction:

Reading paraprofessionals will select, monitor, and modify instructional procedures based on the characteristics and needs of students.

- Use procedures for ongoing informal assessments appropriate for specific students and subject areas in order to modify instruction and achieve maximum effectiveness.
- Use instructional strategies and materials to accommodate students' backgrounds, learning styles, aptitudes (potential), attitudes, interests, levels of achievement and development.

2. With teacher supervision:

Reading paraprofessionals will select, monitor, and modify instructional procedures to fit varying learning conditions.

- Provide effective assistance in reading instruction within the constraints of the classroom, school, district, and community.
- Select and use various instructional techniques for teaching reading and content that help the student build meaning and take into account what the student is reading, what the student's task is, and the conditions for learning.
- Select and use methods and materials that promote reading growth, stimulate interest in and appreciation for books, and increase motivation to read independently for information and for pleasure.

3. With teacher direction:

Reading paraprofessionals will select, monitor, and modify instructional procedures to promote learning in the different content areas.

- Assist students in building meaning from text by instructing them in knowing what to do, why to do it, when to do it, and how to do it.
- Assist students not only in learning specific content, but learning how to learn (process).
- Integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction with subject area content.

#### B. CREATING A LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

With teacher direction reading paraprofessionals will:

1. Get students involved in practical activities that show them a real purpose for learning to read.
2. Allow extensive opportunities to read and listen to a variety of well-written material for a wide variety of purposes.
3. Model, discuss, and demonstrate reading as a lifelong pursuit for enjoyment and learning.
4. Engage students in activities that develop their image of themselves as readers.
5. Help students develop responsibility for their own learning.



### C. REINFORCING STRATEGIES FOR INSTRUCTION

#### 1. With teacher direction:

Reading paraprofessionals will use a variety of instructional methods which are appropriate to specific students, texts and tasks to teach reading strategies.

- Use direct instruction about why, when, and how to use reading strategies.
- Use methods that gradually shift responsibility for using a specific strategy from the instructor to the student.
- Help students to develop an integrated reading process, including sight vocabulary, word recognition procedures (using phonics, structural analysis and contextual clues), vocabulary and concept development, and constructing meaning strategies.

#### 2. With teacher direction:

Reading paraprofessionals will help students to be in charge of their own learning and to develop flexible, effective ways to comprehend subject matter.

- Help students to activate and build upon prior knowledge, and to set purpose for reading.
- Help students to construct meaning through metacognitive and fix-up strategies\*.
- Help students to connect meaning with what they already know.
- Help students learn to initiate questions before, during, and after reading to enhance meaning construction.
- Help students recognize and use patterns of organization in text (storymaps, cause and effect) before, during, and after reading to aid learning and memory of important information.
- Help students to use knowledge about different genre\*\* to aid comprehension and learning.

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\*Ways in which students have knowledge and control over their own thinking and learning activities.

\*\*Types of literature.

### II. ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT READING AND READING INSTRUCTION

Reading paraprofessionals will realize:

- A. The importance of staying current in knowing how to assist teachers in reading instruction and a willingness to participate in professional development.
- B. The importance of reading aloud to students.
- C. The importance of viewing reading as a process rather than a series of activities.
- D. The value of communicating to students the importance of reading as a means to learn and an activity which enhances the quality of life.
- E. The importance of holding high expectations that all students can learn to read.



- F. The importance of building collegiality with other staff through regular conversations.
- G. The importance of emphasizing the use of print and writing materials in a positive rather than a punitive manner.

### **III. COMMUNICATING INFORMATION**

- A. Upon the teacher's request, reading paraprofessionals will share observations regarding student performance and assist in communicating relevant information.

## **APPENDIX I**

As paraprofessionals gain experience, it is hoped they will become knowledgeable about the reading process. Ideally, the district will devote resources (e.g., funds, time, trainers) to enable paraprofessionals to continue to attain proficiency.

### **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT READING AND READING INSTRUCTION**

#### **I. GOALS AND PURPOSES OF READING INSTRUCTION**

The goal of reading instruction is the development of independent, strategic, motivated readers who regard reading as a lifelong pursuit. This view of the proficient reader is the basis of the philosophy of reading and the goals and objectives for reading education as adopted by the Michigan State Board of Education.

#### **II. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE DECISIONS ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION**

##### **A. Knowledge of the Reading Process**

Research indicates the following:

- A relationship exists between language development and reading development.
- Human growth and development impacts the physical, emotional, social, cultural, and intellectual areas as they relate to reading and reading instruction.

Theories of the reading process have the following implications for reading instruction:

- Reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation.
- A relationship exists between emergent literacy and beginning speaking.
- There is a relationship between reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- Self-image plays an active role in the development of motivated readers.
- Higher order thinking skills are essential to the reading process.
- Phonics and word recognition skills are important to the reading process when taught in context using a planned and flexible approach.
- The role of instruction is important in helping students develop comprehension strategies and procedures to monitor their own learning.



**B. Knowledge of Individual Differences**

Research indicates the following:

- Prior knowledge, metacognitive abilities, aptitudes, attitudes, self-concept, learning styles, language development, and motivation influence the reading process.
- Cultural and ethnic diversity and limited-English proficiency influence the reading process.
- Learners process information through a variety of learning styles.

**C. Knowledge of Instructional Materials**

Research indicates that awareness of the following is important to the reading process:

- The structure, content, strengths and weaknesses of the basal reading program, content area text, and a wide variety of children's and adolescents' narrative materials.
- Computer software and other supplementary materials for reading instruction.
- The relationship between reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- The importance of exposing learners to various types and genres of text (fiction/nonfiction, fable/fairy tale, poetry, etc.)

**III. KNOWLEDGE OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

Research indicates the following:

- Contextual factors such as content, purpose, task, and setting influence the reading process and learning to read.
- Evaluations and grouping procedures can influence motivation and learning.
- Contextual factors can influence students' performance on measures of reading achievement.
- Conditions in the home, school, district, and community can affect classroom learning.
- Parents' participation can influence a child's learning to read.

**APPENDIX II**

**ROLE OF THE READING PARAPROFESSIONAL**

**WITH TEACHER DIRECTION:**

- Assists in showing students how to build meaning before, during, and after reading.
- Creates a literate environment.
- Reinforces skills/strategies for instruction by assisting identified students, individually and in small groups, with practice activities that supplement the teacher's instruction.
- Supervises identified students as they carry out assignments such as work sheets, journal writing, creative projects, and learning center activities.
- Encourages identified students to perform assignments successfully and to develop appropriate classroom behavior.
- Observes identified students during reinforcement activities and shares



observations with the teachers during planning sessions; communicates relevant information.

- Prepares instructional materials for skill reinforcement with identified students.
- Maintains daily and weekly schedules, planning books, and samples of students' work in student folders.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF READING PARAPROFESSIONALS**

adopted January 1992

by the  
**MICHIGAN READING ASSOCIATION**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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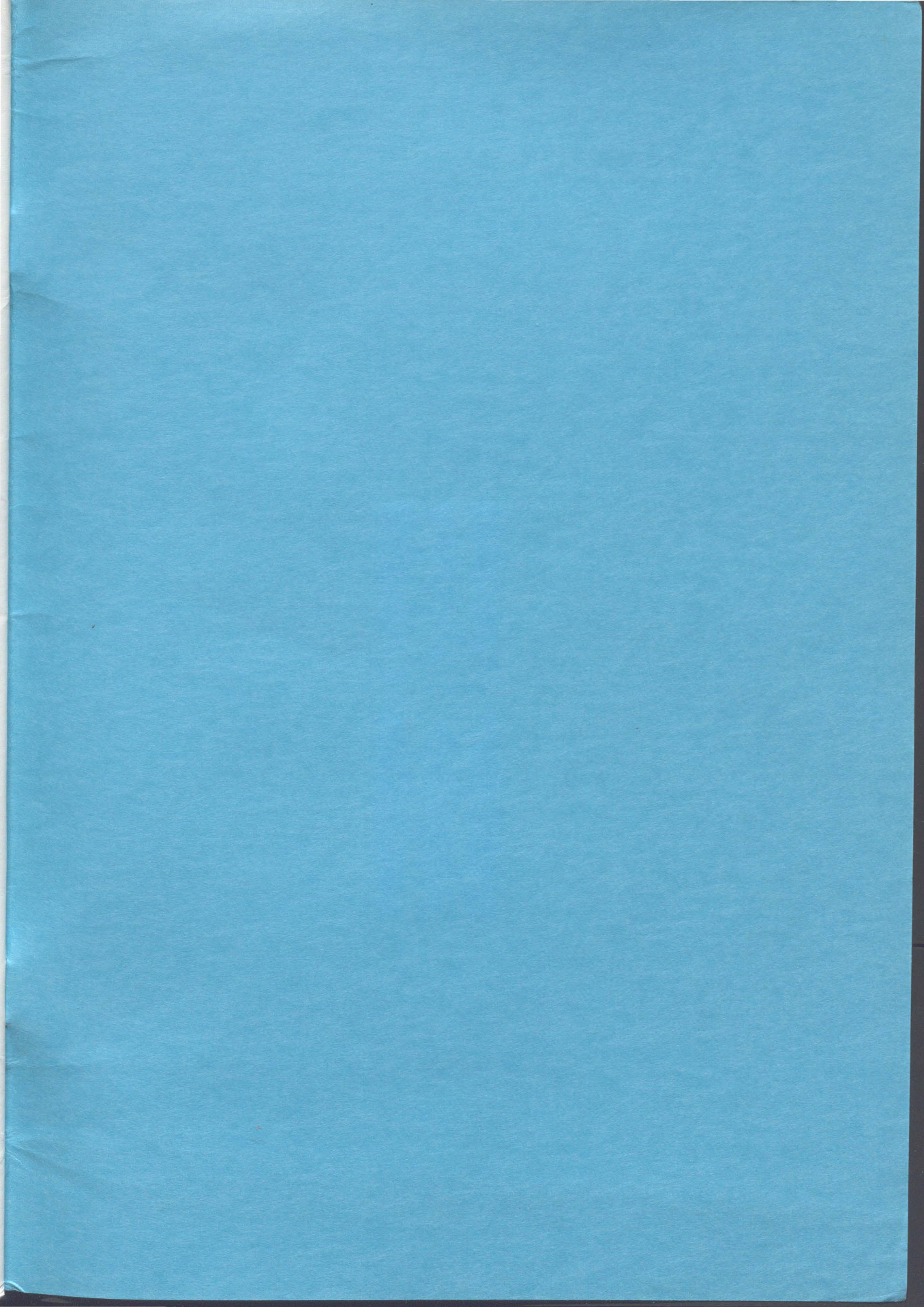
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