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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF READING IMPROVEMENT

by Dr. Lois A. Bader

*The Board of Directors of the prestigious **College Reading Association** recently met in Knoxville to discuss the future of reading education in our country. The **College Reading Association** is a non-profit professional organization of college educators concerned with the training of effective reading educators at all levels. It is the largest body of its kind in the United States of America. At the close of the two day conference, Dr. Lois Bader, president of the organization issued the following statement.*

The proliferation of reading skill improvement businesses is an indictment of the public schools throughout the United States. While engaging in the Back to Basic rhetoric, the schools have cut thousands of reading specialists' positions over the past ten years. The results were predictable.

The first result of the loss of reading specialists in the schools was an increase in the number of children given special education labels. Because funds have been available for special education teachers, many children who needed help in reading were categorized as learning disabled or emotionally impaired.

Secondly, poor children who received inadequate remedial assistance dropped out of school. In districts with large numbers of

poor minorities, some elementary schools retained reading teachers with the help of outside funding, but on the secondary level the need for assistance was ignored.

We now have a situation where parents who can afford private instruction in reading are doing so. However, even they are not obtaining the best instruction for their children because many of the private "clinics" or "centers" are quite poor. Nevertheless, the number of their clients is increasing. A distressing practice of some businesses is the use of a technique, developed in the 1930's, for certain kinds of brain damage victims. A few schools whose administrators appear to be ignorant of the field of reading have contracted with some of the questionable businesses to provide inservice sessions for their teachers. Thus, they can mollify taxpayers who have protested the lack of remedial instruction for their children. The publicity of some of the businesses is clever. But, public school administrators should be able to protect their children and teachers by not endorsing or employing these people.

At a time when talented, well prepared specialists in reading are available, parents should not be forced to pay people outside the schools for assistance, or have children live with an erroneous label or do without appropriate instruction. It is true that not all specialists with a degree in reading are equally knowledgeable and committed. But schools have an obligation to employ the best and to obtain the best inservice instruction for the teachers. They should employ specialists who know how to develop programs that prevent reading disabilities as well as specialists to provide remediation. Professionals in the field of reading have a

Dr. Lois A. Bader, President,
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some 30 years later is still viable. Your commitment as a member of this state's largest and most prestigious professional organization is to become involved, to continue to upgrade your skills in order to have an impact on the future. Your commitment is to yourself, to accept the challenge of new ideas and to look at change as an addition to the future combined with the heritage of the past.

As an organization, the Michigan Reading Association has and always will continue to accept challenges and promote change. The commitment of its members and elected officers will enable us to provide leadership in the field of reading to all interested educators not only across the state but within the entire Great Lakes Region as well as the remainder of the IRA chain.

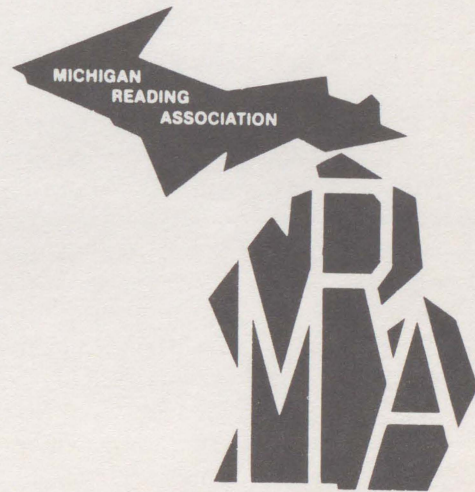
As we reflect upon our past commitment, let us strive to be even more. Let us know that we are not here to "curse the darkness" as John Kennedy said "but to light the candle that can guide us through the darkness to a safe and sane future." There is still much to be done, so let us go forth and attend these sessions, interacting with our colleagues and gaining new knowledge.

In concluding, let me say that the leadership of each and every one of our Past Presidents has enabled MRA to provide timely responses to critical issues of the time and to provide quality conferences representing many points of view, but the same goal - that of promoting increased literacy. The Past Presidents are the link between the past and the future. Their challenges are our challenges, and you must work - we all must work - to enhance the reading potential for one and all.

Because a small group of people in 1956 led by Dr. Edgar L. DeForest dared to look to the future, to reach out, to build and to dream, MRA is now known for its intense and genuine commitment to reading, for the tremendous knowledge of its members about reading theory and practice, for the quality of its publications, for its resourcefulness as a political force in this state, and for its willingness to take part in any effort to improve reading. There is no question that MRA has been and will continue to be in the words of Past IRA President Dr. William Eller, A Premier State Reading Organization one that remembers the past as our heritage,

the present as our responsibility, and the future as our challenge.

Thank you Dr. DeForest and all the Past Presidents for making this moment possible.



MRA logo designed in 1981 by Jan Cupp, a first grade teacher from Ypsilanti.

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tremendous amount of expertise that is not available in the public schools. As Dr. Bader testified in a congressional hearing in 1981, professors in higher education know how reading and writing should be taught, but they don't know how to deal with the politics and economics of education that interfere with the delivery of that knowledge.