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# A Staff Development Model For Secondary Content Teachers

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Historically, four problems have militated against the successful development of a comprehensive secondary reading program: (a) how reading has been traditionally taught and conceptualized at the secondary level, (b) the lack of an adequately trained staff, (c) the increasing number of teachers who have reached the top of the salary scale and are no longer required to update their skills, and (d) an inadequate training model.

While educators have referred to "comprehensive reading programs" in secondary schools and interest has been expressed at both state and local levels, little substantial information exists as to how to develop such a program. Most reading programs at the secondary level tend to operate in isolation without much continuity.

Traditionally, reading programs at the secondary level have developed in four ways: (a) a remedial approach, working basically with only the most severely disabled readers; (b) a developmental approach, conducting special reading/study skills classes for the disabled, as well as the average and above readers; (c) a content approach, infusing reading skills into content materials; and (d) a combination of any of the three above approaches.

Unfortunately, in the vast majority of programs, the remedial and developmental components operate as isolated segments in the secondary curriculum, allowing content teachers to abdicate their responsibilities for reading improvement to the reading specialist or to the English teacher assigned to teach reading. What generally happens with this approach is that students receive special assistance for one fifty-minute segment of the day

while the rest of their content teachers continue to treat them as if they were not a part of any special program. In other words, little is done to compensate for students' disabilities once they leave the reading teacher's class.

## YPSILANTI'S SEARCH FOR A PROGRAM

During the 1978-79 school year, Ypsilanti Public Schools initiated a search to identify a successful comprehensive high school reading program. The staff reviewed articles in textbooks and journals, contacted nationally known reading authorities, and attended state and national conferences in search of methods to assist secondary teachers and students. Staff development became the main area of concentration as the staff began to realize that in order to implement a comprehensive program, they had to devise a systematic method of reinforcing reading skills across the various content areas. The criteria utilized in reviewing existing staff development programs included: (a) the instructional strategies utilized in the training sessions, (b) the precepts upon which the inservice model was predicated, (c) the personnel and financial resources needed to implement the model, (d) the strategies employed to reinforce reading skills across disciplines, (e) the length of the program, and (f) the type of improvement in reading performance attributed to the program.

Programs that were identified through the search suffered from various weaknesses. Most programs were of short duration, generally less than one year in length. Most models were predicated upon the assumption that once teachers were provided with some basic skills in the area of reading, the program

would perpetuate itself. This was especially true of programs that were closely associated with university personnel. The model most frequently used was that of employing an off campus college course. This approach was generally expected to produce results after six months to a year. No attempt was made to develop a long term program that used an internal resource person who would be responsible for staff development on a continuous basis.

As this analysis reveals, most programs contained only parts of a comprehensive model. While many programs at the secondary level state they do indeed have a reading program, generally they were very superficial or limited. For this reason, it was felt that a more comprehensive approach was needed.

## MODEL

The model developed at Ypsilanti High School incorporates all the essential components for a successful high school reading program. These components are remedial, developmental and content. These components are integrated through a series of on going inservice sessions that train teachers to implement content processing skills into their instructional plans. Content-related reading skills are systematically reinforced throughout all phases of the curriculum. It is the continuous reinforcement of these elements that differentiates this model from previously existing programs.

### Remedial Reading Program

The remedial reading program services students who are reading two or more years below grade level. The program is an elective course designed to help ninth grade students acquire basic reading skills and refine those skills which are

necessary for success in content areas. Instruction is based on a diagnostic-prescriptive method and includes large group and small group interaction as well as individual student skill work. Special emphasis is placed on reinforcing the content processing skills which are being stressed in the staff development sessions. The remedial reading teachers prepare content processing activities that reinforce these skills in the lab situation.

### **Developmental Reading Program**

The developmental reading program services students who display adequate mastery of word recognition and literal comprehension skills. The program is an elective course offering instruction in interpretive, critical and creative reading skills, vocabulary development, study skills, flexible reading rates, and content processing skill reinforcement. The developmental reading teacher prepares activities that reinforce the content processing skills in the developmental reading class.

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN CONTENT AREA READING**

This component of the program is divided into three phases. Each phase takes one year to implement; each person in the program goes through all three phases.

**Phase I** — Teachers from a variety of content areas participated in the program, i.e., language arts, social studies, science, business, special education, alternative education and human resources. Phase I training consists of numerous sessions on how to teach and reinforce six content processing skills: (a) perceiving relationships between ideas, (b) recognizing main ideas, (c) discovering cause and effect relationships, (d) perceiving comparative and contrastive relationships, (e) arranging information in its proper sequence, and (f) developing problem solving techniques. In conjunction with these content processing skills follow-up sessions were conducted to develop manipulative activities to teach the skills in content classrooms. These activities actively involved students through the use of group instruction that required them to apply content and process simultaneously. The reading support teacher worked with the content teacher to imple-

ment the content lessons. Phase I teachers received additional training in the development of objective referenced tests. A test was developed for each content area.

**Phase II** — During the second phase of training, teachers continued to implement content activities. In addition, they received training in small group management, diagnostic teaching strategies, utilization of test score data, and inter and intradepartmental articulation strategies.

**Phase III** — Teachers in the third phase of training continued to refine their content processing strategies. In addition, they learned how to utilize MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) and objective referenced test results, developed and utilized group informal reading inventories and developed student profiles. Emphasis was placed on differentiating instruction based on the results from the objective referenced tests. Phase III teachers also participated in sessions in which they trained other teachers.

To implement the program a number of key personnel were utilized. The training was conducted by an external consultant who worked in conjunction with the internal consultant. The internal consultant was essential if the program is to succeed. She has the responsibility for the day to day operations of the program. It was also essential that the high school administration gain an understanding of what constitutes a comprehensive reading program. Consequently, both the external and internal consultants met periodically with them. Central office administrative support was also crucial to the success of the program. They made sure that sufficient financial support was available throughout the program.

Evaluation of the program has been very positive. Not only are teacher attitudes and behaviors changing, but there has been a concomitant gain in student reading scores. Continued use and development of these strategies demonstrates the extent to which teachers have incorporated these strategies into their classroom activities. There is a trend toward small group interactive instruction. Instruction has become now focused with the use of content-specific

reading data. There is an increased amount of inter and intradepartmental articulation as the teachers are refocusing curriculum development to become more process oriented and are asking questions regarding future curricular implications.

### **SUMMARY**

After a systematic review of existing programs and three years of implementing the staff development model, the program appears to offer feasible solutions to reading problems high school students' experience.

Incorporated in the program are all the components identified as essential for a successful high school reading program. Specifically, remedial instruction, developmental instruction, content instruction, staff development (planned with the teachers), follow-up workshops, in-school support teachers, administrative support, time to coordinate and dialogue about the program, and resources available to assist teachers with program implementation. In fact over 600 content reading activities have been developed and implemented, a central resource file was created, eight content-specific reading tests were developed, course descriptions for remedial reading, developmental reading, were developed and reading support services were written and implemented, strategies for coordinating the various components of the program were developed, and strategies for utilizing MEAP results in central classes were constructed. (A complete description of the program is contained in program and training manuals). This model has provided a systematic method for reinforcing reading across content areas and is one example of a truly comprehensive secondary reading program.

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