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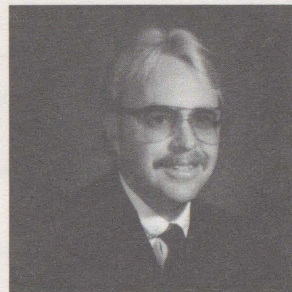
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# Research and the Reading Program



by Michael F. Freeland

On May 6, 1986 the State Board of Education adopted a philosophy regarding reading that stated:

*"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."*

Fortunately, the State Department of Education did not stop there. They outline three action goals which necessitated the following:

1. Provide educators with knowledge which incorporates
  - a. current research affecting reading,
  - b. information on the current status of reading achievement and the necessary strategies for comprehension,
  - c. Michigan's adopted policy regarding reading: standards and objectives.
2. Assist educators in the process of using current research to make decisions impacting curriculum and provide appropriate professional development models for acquiring the necessary skills
3. Establish support systems within the school, district, region, and state that will enable educators to build reading programs that incorporate the new philosophy of reading.

This knowledge regarding the reading process is based on findings gleaned from current research in the area of cognitive psychology which moves literacy beyond the literal interpretation to include critical and

creative thinking. (Dr. Elaine Weber, MASCD conference, October, 1986).

The State Department of Education has also given two levels of the **"State Plan for Reading."**

## **FIRST LEVEL:**

Educators will have acquired knowledge to establish the following beliefs about reading,

1. reading is a constructive process,
2. reading is a dynamic process affected by reader, text, and context,
3. prior knowledge that the reader has for the topic and the text structure affects reading,
4. good readers employ metacognitive processes appropriately as they read.

To accomplish this at Ionia Public Schools, in-servicing and professional development are made available to all staff members. Initially, a cadre of core reading instructors and administrators have been identified to become more knowledgeable with the new definition of reading to help enhance the planning and implementation of the revision of the reading curriculum. After this group has been trained, they will have the opportunity to act as facilitators at various school sites. It is essential all instructors have awareness and have the foundation of necessary research.

Also significant is the staff's participation in the planning and decision-making stage, as well as their involvement in the implementation and evaluation of the in-servicing. At Ionia Public Schools we are also

fortunate to have a full time Reading Consultant, Dr. Laura Rauner-Rolph, to help facilitate this undertaking.

## **SECOND LEVEL:**

Educators knowledgeable in the research related to reading will:

*(In preparation of the lesson)*

- develop process objectives for each lesson,
- develop content objectives for each lesson,
- select considerate and comprehensive text,
- develop conceptual and/or structural maps for narrative and informational text,
- design lessons that include the essential elements of reading instruction,
- design and select questions which focus the reader's attention on significant aspects of the text, as well as, the essential skills of critical reading.

*(Before assigning the reading)*

- access and identify the reader's prior knowledge of life experiences, the topic, and text structures,
- provide instruction in areas where prior knowledge is lacking,
- activate prior knowledge,
- help readers establish purpose for reading,
- use strategies to help students understand concepts.

*(During reading)*

- provide explicit instruction,
- model metacognitive processes,
- transfer to the reader control of demonstrated metacognitive processes,
- monitor and adjust the reader's use of metacognitive processes.

To accomplish all of the second level, time is the most significant variable. Grade level meetings (after school hours) are one avenue we have used. In the future, we look to schedule afternoon release time to work on this and other projects. Though this calls for "creative scheduling," it can be accomplished and still remain within the new state guidelines for count days.

Teachers should also have the opportunity to be monitored by a "coach" or team teacher to help monitor progress and to give crucial feedback. Though many instructors are already working with these concepts, the sequencing and thought processes involved need support.

*"It is a significant issue that the process of reading encompasses acquiring information from print in **all** subject areas. The purpose of a reading program is to prepare students to meet the reading demands related to constructing meaning from text materials, (a) under all instructional conditions, (b) for all possible purposes, (c) in all subject areas.*

*"These standards for reading not only assure the development of literal and inferential comprehension, but include the 'beyond text' levels that integrate information from other text sources and the prior knowledge of the reader. These further assure the inclusion of the self-monitoring strategies identified as logical, critical and creative thinking."* (State Department of Education)

This is a very good start in the right direction. It also gives the school district an opportunity while they are working on this project to include some other areas of instruction (along with reading) to be emphasizing in **all** classes. These include:

- communication skills (writing, speaking, listening, along with reading)
- reasoning skills
- organizational skills
- informational skills
- decision-making skills
- problem solving skills

One overall way Ionia Public Schools is addressing these pertinent issues is with a district wide School Improvement Plan. Using this vehicle, not only are the educators involved, but also community members through School Site Advisory Councils.

The overall process of curriculum revision is always a challenging one at best, but the benefits and the winners in the long run are the students.

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