

# READING: THE DIRECTION OF THE HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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In January, 1976, Department of Education Superintendent Charles G. Clark, in his testimony before the Senate Ways and Means Committee, assured the legislature that reading and the basic skills would play an important part in curriculum improvement undertaken by his administration. "Improvements will be targeted on several fronts," he indicated. "Basic language arts skills will be stressed. Any decline in the area is an alarming situation. It becomes more critical as our students enter an age in which the power to reason and make decisions depends upon the mastery of those skills." To carry out this commitment, the Office of Instructional Services initiated program improvement efforts in reading to determine what the problems were, why they occurred, and what had to be done.

An intensive analysis of information gathered from various sources was conducted. These sources included standardized test scores and criterion-referenced tests — including a statewide Foundation Program Assessment and Improvement System (FPAIS) reading assessment test. Non-test data, based on teacher observations, were used when available. Other sources were utilized to complete the statewide picture. A survey was conducted to determine the major types of reading programs used statewide. The content of workshop and course requests and a recent HSTA survey which polled teachers on in-service training preferences were examined. A joint DOE and University of Hawaii committee was formed to determine the quality and relevance of the University's pre- and in-service programs. District curriculum specialists, administrators and teachers expressed their concerns in meetings, workshops and professional conferences. Districts actively involved in an assessment and improvement process were able to provide information and insights into reading problems. Through parent workshops and involvement in the State Right to Read Advisory Council, parents and community members expressed their concerns.

A complex system of relationships emerged. Each identified problem was, in some way, related to other problems. The learner, the curriculum, the teacher and administrator were all important aspects of this system. Changing or modifying one group had effects upon the other. Merely diagnosing learners more precisely would not solve the reading problem. Nor would only providing

in-service training for teachers be the total problem. Developing new curriculum materials would not solve the problems unless there was proper management and leadership provided by administrators.

Based upon the analysis of the data, four major areas requiring attention were delineated:

1. A Language Arts Program which emphasizes:
  - reading comprehension and meaningful integration of word recognition skills;
  - motivation, and
  - functional use of skills.
2. A State In-Service Training Plan which provides:
  - for the development of accessible and on-site expert cadre services;
  - a variety of ways — individual and group, formal and informal — to gain knowledge and skills, and
  - situation-specific in-service training.
3. A Curriculum Management System which helps the administrator at all levels of the Department:
  - provide leadership in curriculum improvement;
  - utilize curricular data for decisionmaking in program improvement, personnel utilization and budgetary planning;
  - maintain program accountability, and
  - promote cooperative problemsolving.
4. Involvement of Parents and Volunteers in the education of learners so that:
  - parents can be aware of the influence of the home on learning to read and can take a more active and legitimate part in their children's education, and
  - parents can see themselves as partners working together with both teachers and principals.

These areas represent general emphases and are descriptive in nature, rather than prescriptive. Only the individual, in specific situations, has the necessary information to decide what is appropriate. However, the State's direction and emphasis will be based upon these four assessed areas.

## Major Emphases in the Instructional Program

1. The reading program should emphasize more idea-centered, rather than only skills-centered, instruction — with comprehension or meaning as its primary

- goal. This is true whether the learner is a beginning reader in the first-grade or a fluent reader in the seventh-grade.
2. Reading instruction should be learner-oriented, using the learner's experience, knowledge and social experience to help him understand other peoples' ideas in oral and written form. Instruction should be more interactive — between teacher and learner; and with more direct instruction given to children, either individually or in groups. This gives the learner opportunities to clarify, validate and use different language functions.
  3. Readiness instruction should utilize more conceptual readiness strategies (language, experience and thinking) rather than only perceptual-based readiness strategies (e.g., visual and auditory discrimination, visual sequencing).
  4. The reading and language arts programs should be more of a comprehensive developmental-preventative nature, rather than remedial-clinical.
  5. The learner — not the program or materials — should be the primary focus of the instructional process.
  6. Reading instruction should be integrated with writing, listening and speaking. All language arts activities should have communicative functions; that is, a real purpose to serve.
  7. Concepts and language of the content area should be utilized in all grade levels. Even in the early elementary grades, learners' experiences in content knowledge are the bases for comprehending. Reading should be fun and, at the very least, functional.
  8. Reading instruction should be inherently humane; that is, it should allow for errors and risk-taking and help the learner feel that he *can* learn.

#### Major Emphases in the State In-Service Training Plan

1. In-service training should be planned appropriately for different audiences, such as principals, teachers and parents.
2. In-service training will emphasize a variety of modes and formats. Parents, teachers and principals will be able to learn in individual or small-group settings, as well as in traditional workshop and course formats. Teacher banks will be developed at schools which house materials, new techniques and self-learning activities.
3. Coordinating in-service training with other programs will be emphasized. Title I, ESAA, Special Education, and Bilingual Education workshops will be coordinated and integrated when feasible.
4. Long-range developmental planning for continuing professional growth will be encouraged. A developmental plan delineating levels of development, kinds of experiences and standards for cadre development has been formulated.

5. A training plan will emphasize cadre development to provide support to school-level teachers and principals.
6. A closer relationship with the University of Hawaii and other teacher training institutions will be established to develop more relevant and timely course offerings.

#### Major Emphases in Curriculum Management

1. The utilization of a systematic process of program improvement which focuses upon learners' needs and the identification of successful instructional strategies will be implemented. Haphazard and inconsistent improvement procedures may cause inconsistent program articulation, classroom management problems, and narrow and rigid instructional practices.
2. Another major effort is the utilization of program management practices which encourage team effort. This process includes the use of collaborative planning, implementation and evaluation. Problemsolving is a major process.
3. There will be an increase in school-level program options, but with the concurrent responsibility of sound instructional decisionmaking.
4. Coordinated planning and implementation in all programs, such as Title I, ESAA, Special Education, and Bilingual Education will be stressed.

#### Major Emphases in Parent Involvement

1. Parents are partners in education. By utilizing and capitalizing on normal at-home situations, there is much that parents can do in helping students succeed in school.
2. Development of natural instructional techniques that parents can use in helping learners in reading and language development will be available.
3. An emphasis will be placed on the crucial role parents play, early in the learner's life, in developing positive attitudes towards reading.

There is no easy way to improve reading achievement, no solution you can buy ready-made from the shelf. The solution lies in people working together in combining their energies, abilities, and knowledge. The ingredients are already there. Do we have the leadership and courage to begin combining the ingredients to initiate the search for quality education for our children? This is the challenge to educators and parents of Hawaii.

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