the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Under the leadership of Superintendent Constance Clayton, writing has been given a high priority. In a very concentrated way, the School District of Philadelphia has been striving to teach students to write better, and also to utilize writing in every subject area as a way of learning.

Nationally, employers and institutions of higher education complain bitterly that students are unable to compose their thoughts on paper or present them in a reasonably correct form. This is confirmed by a federal study, conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which reported last year that less than one-third of students write adequately.

Most people looking back to their years in school will know how writing has been taught in Philadelphia and schools across the nation. In the lower grades, children wrote little more than short letters or brief answers to questions. At the high school level, writing of longer pieces was done only in English class and even there it was infrequent. Writing was done for the teacher and returned covered with blood-red marks indicating errors. It was a painful, sterile process which discouraged writing.

When the Philadelphia Alliance for Teaching Humanities in the Schools (PATHS) was created in January 1984, one of Dr. Clayton's first requests was to work with the School District on planning and implementing a writing effort in all schools. The "Writing Across the Curriculum" project was born. The charge was to improve the quality of student writing across the district and increase opportunities for students in every subject area to utilize writing in the learning process.

PATHS based its long-range plan on some fundamental principles. Teachers should be important and integral to every aspect of the planning and ensuing training so that the plans and their execution would rise out of the classroom rather than being imposed on it from above. The Writing project should be constructed in such a way that it would foster collaboration and lead to the development of a collegial atmosphere in the schools and the districts.

During the first year, 1984-85, there were 64 pilot schools involved. Each of the seven subdistricts had a PATHS writing team composed of teachers, department heads, principals, supervisors, curriculum specialists, various administrators, librarians, and consultants from colleges and universities. They held monthly meetings which combined professional development for the participants with planning for bringing new information, perspectives, methods and skills to an ever-widening group of teachers. In

1985-86, the number of schools was increased to 147, and 11 more were added last year. It is expected that by the end of this year, all the schools will be participating in the Writing Across the Curriculum project. Achievement of the project's goals will require a continuing process of growth and development for all schools.

While the professional development and planning was occurring at the district level in a collegial environment, more and more schools were mirroring the effort within their buildings. The representatives from the schools to the district teams brought back and disseminated to the rest of the faculty the new ideas and methods they had learned. They have accomplished the most in schools where the principal has demonstrated a strong commitment to writing and provided faculty meeting time, support and necessary resources.

MORE WRITING

As it was designed to do, the PATHS effort has led to changes in many schools. Across the city, at all levels, more and different kinds of writing are occurring. You will see bulletin boards and walls covered with student writing varying from autobiographies to a first person description of life in the Stone Age. Schools acclaim writers and celebrate writing by posting pictures of their best writers, or mounting student work on the "Writing Gallery" walls outside the main office. One secondary school holds an annual contest to find and acclaim the all-school writing champion. Schools and districts publish collections of work done by students at every grade level.

The PATHS writing-to-learn thrust is expanding too. Teachers are trying different techniques to increase learning. Teachers give their students a 3 x 5 card and a few minutes at the end of the period to record the most important thing that they learned that day. Writing it down crystallizes it for the students and gives the teacher insight into what they learned. Teachers depart from assigning questions in the textbook and ask their students to write their reactions, questions and conclusions as they read. When they do this, they become personally engaged and get more from the text. Techniques like these have value at all levels in all subjects. Many secondary teachers of subjects other than English have difficulty seeing themselves as teachers of writing, but they can come to see that writing of this kind is a highly useful tool for helping their students learn their subject. Increasingly, teachers see the value of having students write to increase their understanding, raise questions, and become actively involved in their learning.

Other resources have been of assistance to the writing effort in the School District. There is a National Writing Project, with more than 150 sites across the country, which is dedicated to the improvement of writing instruction. Since 1980, a site at West Chester University has offered teachers a one-month summer seminar. At least 40 Philadelphia teachers have attended and then brought back what they learned to their schools. In 1986, a similar resource, the Philadelphia Writing Project (PhilWP) was established at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

Fundamental to the thinking of the National and the Philadelphia Writing Projects is the concept that to teach writing well, you have to be a "writer." You have to be free of the anxiety, fear and discomfort, associated with writing, that so many adults carry with them from their early days as students.

I visited the Summer Institute of PhilWP last August. I joined thirty of Philadelphia's most highly effective teachers for a morning of teaching and learning that they could recreate in their classrooms with their students. The teachers sat in a big circle. They were asked to jot down some key words or concepts from their assigned reading which included philosophies, theories and current research in the field of writing. After a very few minutes, Dr. Susan Lytle, the director of the Philadelphia Writing Project, went around the circle and asked each person to give her one of their words or phrases to put up on the board. Then everyone spent a brief time jotting down a specific incident from their own classroom experience illustrative of one of the words or phrases. Each person shared her writing with a partner sitting next to her and then spent twenty minutes developing it more fully. Following that, the teachers divided into groups of three. As each one read what she had written, the two listeners told the writer what they had heard in the piece, or how the story seemed to be connected to the reading they had done, or how it raised questions that would require further reading, writing or thinking.

There is much to be drawn from the Philadelphia Writing Project's Summer Institute. As she works with teachers, Dr. Lytle models many excellent ways of working with children, although this is not explicitly stated but left for participants to realize. For example, the small groups which help teachers grow as writers can be duplicated in classrooms with students. The various ways that teachers work in the Institute help them to see that the purpose of writing is to get something of significance to the author down on paper and that writing often leads to the development of ideas and an opportunity to think things through. That August morning, participants selected topics that were meaningful and important to them and shared their writing and discussed it with other members of the group. In a cooperative, supportive setting, they could develop or refine their thinking, gain a new perspective, or see new relationships between ideas or practices. In this way, a community of learners is created, and through the interchange of ideas, they help each other learn. The classroom becomes a place where all can be active participants. The teacher becomes more of a facilitator than a central figure.

THE VALUE OF WRITING

Writing is an important part of the PhilWP Institute. Each person writes daily and must develop two pieces to be reproduced and distributed to Institute participants and others. Almost all of those who come to the Institute, thinking they can't write, find they can express themselves successfully in writing. It's an exciting discovery. It gives them a new power and new understandings.

Teachers who have this Institute experience grasp intellectually and emotionally the very great value of writing and the methods that Dr. Lytle uses. Talking to these teachers or reading their "published" pieces reveals the power of this experience. For most, it provides new insights and great personal growth.

The teachers who attended the 1987 Institute are Teacher-Consultants (TCs) now. They join those who attended in 1986, many of whom returned this summer for advanced training. The TCs have the knowledge and insight they need to help other teachers incorporate more and better writing of all kinds into their teaching.

There are 55 Teacher-Consultants now who collaborate with other teachers, most often on a

one-to-one basis. Typically, collaboration involves visits to the TC's classroom, lengthy analytical discussions, and often a demonstration lesson in the classroom of the teacher who wants to adopt new strategies for increasing and improving writing. TCs also work with small groups of teachers and make presentations and do workshops at faculty meetings and district writing meetings.

The Teacher-Consultants continue to have their own classrooms but the School District provides seven full-time people, one for each district, who take over classes. This allows a TC to visit another teacher's class or for that teacher to visit the TC's.

As a part of the Philadelphia Writing Project, the TCs meet monthly during the year. They continue their own professional growth and share and get feedback on what they have learned or experienced in working with other teachers.

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to measure the writing improvement that can be attributed to the Writing Across the Curriculum Project. The ultimate evaluation will be done by employers and colleges. In the meantime, experience and common sense tell us that when students write more, they become better writers and when students do more writing to learn, they learn more.

The School District's writing effort should be strengthened in two important ways. First, principals, and all those providing leadership to the writing effort, should have the opportunity to receive the same intensive training given to the Teacher-Consultants. This would enable more of this important group of people to personally experience the development of "writers" and the use of writing in learning. It would also enable them to study in greater depth the latest thinking and research about writing. Second, city-wide tests should include essay questions requiring students to compose answers. This would be another significant way to show that writing is highly valued.

The School District is to be highly commended for its willingness and ability to cooperate and collaborate with PATHS and the many other outside resources that have worked with it to increase and improve writing. The District can take pride in the accomplishments of the Writing Across the Curriculum project.

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EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT/CITIES-IN-SCHOOLS

Each year, about 8000 students leave the Philadelphia public schools, most without completing their education, unprepared to get or hold decent jobs. They lack essential academic skills and/or necessary attitudes and work habits. 8000 is a very large number and represents a tragedy of lost opportunity for these young people. It also poses a great problem for employers who currently face a great shortage of capable employees, and for society which faces a growing number of disaffected people who cannot support themselves.

It was a task force of the Committee to Support Philadelphia Public Schools that proposed "a major emphasis in the secondary schools on creating the incentives, program supports and opportunities needed to help students stay in school while achieving the basic academic skills, the work experience and the attitudes needed to make a successful transition to the work place." The Committee, composed of leaders from large local businesses, institutions of higher education and foundations, spearheaded the Education for Employment Initiative/Cities-in-Schools Program. Education for Employment prepares students for the world of work and places many in jobs. It provides them with counseling and other assistance around the issues of career choice and job readiness, performance and advancement. In the high schools, Cities-in-Schools helps students to make the difficult transition from junior high to high school, thereby contributing in a major way to keeping them in school until they receive their diplomas.

The Education for Employment/Cities-in-Schools program began in 1986-87. Last year, it operated in four comprehensive high schools and is in six this year. At each school, there is an Employment Center staffed by at least a School District coordinator and an employment specialist from the Pennsylvania Office of Employment Security. Most of the Centers offer an after-school pre-employment training course; a supervised, subsidized work experience; and placement in part-time jobs during the school year, and part-time or full time jobs during the summer. This preparation for the transition from school to work enables many students to experience success as they begin their job careers. Securing a job and keeping it increases self-confidence and self-esteem and augurs well for a student's job future.

Students receive pre-employment training from outside agencies that specialize in job preparation and placement. They attend classes after school that run 80 hours and cover subjects such as work habits, handling of everyday problems on the job, preparation of a résumé, interviewing skills and the development of a positive self-image.

Students who meet income eligibility standards receive stipends of $3.00 per day for attending these classes. Students who complete the course and pass all of their major subjects are rewarded by becoming eligible for placement in a subsidized summer job, or a part-time job the following year.

A local foundation provides money for 900 jobs allocated to 10-12 high schools. The jobs are funded for 15 hours per week for eight weeks. Employers are encouraged to extend the jobs to 20 hours and pay for the last five hours themselves. Subsidization enables small businesses to create new jobs they could not otherwise afford. It encourages the hiring of young people, who may require training and close supervision, that employers might be unwilling to take a chance on without this financial incentive. To be eligible for these jobs, students must be economically disadvantaged, have completed 10th grade, and have at least a 1.5 average (the equivalent of 3 C's and 2 D's) in their major subjects. The jobs represent a reward for meeting academic standards and help students make the connection between their school work and employment.

The Education for Employment Initiative is attempting to establish the concept of job ladders. Students go from pre-employment training, to a subsidized job, and then to unsubsidized private-sector jobs of increasing responsibility and compensation. As students improve their academic and attendance records, they become eligible for better paying jobs.

The state employment specialists who are based full time in the six schools provide an important service. Coming from nearby state employment offices, they are professionals familiar with local employers. They are skilled and experienced at increasing the pool of jobs suitable for young people, and in getting a good match between an employer's needs and a youngster's abilities. They work intensively with students to help them understand the qualities that employers value, such as dependability and hard work.

The Employment Centers are responsible for developing individual employment plans for students who are seeking jobs. The plans detail a student's school record, his work history including location and outcome of job interviews and employers' evaluations, vocational interests, and information gleaned in interviews. They are designed to aid the student in exploring and developing his interests and skills and in making an informed career choice. They form the basis for working out a progression of jobs that are increasingly more demanding.

CITIES-IN-SCHOOLS

Cities-in-Schools (CIS) gets its name from a national, non-profit corporation which pioneered the coordination of the delivery of all kinds of human services to young people in school buildings. Each year, the coordinator in each of the six high schools selects 60-90 students for the program based on past performance and attendance records which indicate trouble but also suggest that they have the potential to be successful. The program has four elements. Students are closely monitored by the coordinator. Parental involvement is sought. Students are provided with supplementary services. There are incentives to encourage and reward improved behavior, attendance, punctuality, and academic achievement.

The coordinators are the key to the program's success. They make it clear to each of their students that they care deeply about them and how they fare in school. They follow the progress of their Cities-in-Schools stu-

dents carefully. They check the roll books daily for attendance and promptness and call home to check on a student whenever s/he is out. They talk with students and stress the importance of being in school and attending all classes. When there is a difficult problem, the coordinators make a very great effort to contact the parents, even if they have to call them in the evening or at work. They praise improvements. Whenever a CIS student is in trouble, academically or otherwise, teachers and administrators in the school notify the coordinators so they can have a complete picture of their students, serve as an advocate, or provide assistance.

The coordinator works very hard to secure parental support by getting parents into the school and involved with the necessary improvement. All parents must come to school to pick up the first report card. Interim reports are sent home noting both improvements and areas of concern.

Cities-in-Schools coordinators recruit people and solicit services of all kinds to meet student needs. They utilize myriad resources of the School District and the community. They bring in speakers to talk with students and conduct discussions. For example, one agency provides a four-session series which covers teen dating violence, building self-esteem, positive ways to handle anger, and teen drinking. Agencies and organizations are brought into the schools to provide social, mental health, recreational and other services. Volunteers from businesses and organizations come to provide role models, counseling, tutoring, or to serve as mentors.

Incentives are the last of the four elements of CIS. In one school, the coordinator uses a system for changing attitudes and behavior that is based on establishing short, medium, and long range goals. If a student finishes a week without being absent or late, or having a teacher write him up for poor behavior, he gets a coupon entitling him to refreshments at a fast-food restaurant. If he gets a clean slate for 3 weeks out of 4, he gets a bigger prize, such as a ticket to a Phillies game or lunch at a restaurant. If he earns three monthly prizes in a row, he wins a school jacket. At the end of the year, passing everything wins him a boat trip or some other exciting activity.

THE VALUE OF CITIES-IN-SCHOOLS

A group of students chosen for the Cities-in-Schools program last school year proved its necessity and importance. Because the program didn't get started in the schools until late fall, the students didn't get any services until after the first report cards. By that time, of the students selected for the program in one school, a great number were failing 4 or 5 major subjects. As things stood then, only 38% would have had enough credits to be promoted in June. In spite of the difficulty of turning failures into passing grades, the percentage of CIS students who were promoted, in some cases after attending summer school, rose from the anticipated 38% to 63%. On the three important measures of promotion, attendance, and dropouts, the program's statistics show that the CIS students in the four high schools had better rates, and in some cases much better rates, than the entire comparable grade(s) in those schools. This is remarkable when you consider that the CIS students were chosen because they seemed to be headed for school failure.

Cities-in-Schools demonstrates that when the School District shows students that it cares and gives them some individual atten-

tion, they respond positively and achieve a better school record. This serves to reduce the number of students that have to repeat a grade, or who become so discouraged they leave school. While the primary goal should be to reduce student failure because of what that means to youngsters, cutting the number of repeaters may well result in enough savings to offset any additional staffing costs of the program.

Cities-in-Schools proves there is great value in bringing services into schools and coordinating them to meet student needs. Many more students receive essential, beneficial services. Agencies and organizations can more efficiently reach those they seek to help. One dramatic example of the benefits of providing services within schools is an after-school pre-employment training program that was offered directly across the street from a high school. At that site it attracted only 2 students. When it was moved into the school building, it enrolled 45.

I talked with some students who began the Cities-in-Schools program last year. When I asked them what parts of CIS helped them, they spoke of tutoring, rewards in the form of tangible items and trips, the coordinator's constant prodding, and access to immediate assistance when problems arose. One student credited CIS with having built "our courage. It gave us a more confident attitude. We tried harder."

This is a critical time. Demographers tell us that there are fewer young people now than in the past and that this will continue for some time. School districts must play their part in preventing a situation in which the nation's economy suffers because employers have jobs they can't fill while at the same time many people are unemployed because they are incapable of filling available jobs.

Many students need the individualized attention and the added services of Cities-in-Schools if they are to stay in high school and acquire a diploma. Many students need assistance if they are to obtain and be successful in their first jobs. The Education for Employment Initiative/Cities-in-Schools Program provide valuable services. When more time has past and they continue to prove their value, as I am confident they will, they should become an integral part of the standard offerings of every comprehensive high school.

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MAKE LITERATURE CENTRAL TO THE TEACHING OF READING

All across America, a morning visitor to most elementary school classrooms will find the children divided into reading groups working in their basal readers. While one group works with the teacher, the other children sit at their seats filling in blanks in workbooks or doing other assigned related work. Children progress through the grade levels of the particular basal series they are using. Teachers closely follow the teacher's guide that provides them with an exacting script. They teach children sounds, words and skills in a set sequence which is supposed to progress from the less to the more difficult and to lead to the development of readers.

I visited some typical elementary schools in Philadelphia to learn more about how reading is taught. In one second grade, the teacher gathered about one-third of the class in a circle around him. With the teacher's guide in his hand, he began by pointing to words on a chart and asking questions. What kind of word is "doorstep?" The correct answer was "a compound word." What does the "s" mean on the end of toys? "It means more than one." What can you tell me about the word "he'll?" "It's a contraction." Next, the children took turns reading aloud from the reader. At the end of the story, the teacher asked factual questions such as the last name of one of the characters. The homework on the board stressed some of the same skills as those that preceded the story. As earlier, they were unrelated to anything that the students were reading or writing. There were words to make plural, contractions, and instructions to write three words with the short "a" sound.

In a 6th grade, the students had finished a 75-page section of their basal reader and they were being prepared for the test that was to follow. The teacher, following her teacher's guide, asked the students which of the stories that they had read were biographical. The students came up with some correct answers. However, there were incorrect guesses too. Each question had a single right answer. There were no opinion questions and no thought-provoking ones.

In another 6th grade, the basal reader called for a lesson on qualifying ideas in sentences. The teacher held up five red crayons and said, "All of the crayons are red." Then she added five blue crayons and said, "Some of the crayons are red" and then she removed the red crayons from her hand and said, "None of the crayons is red." She wrote the three sentences up on the board underlining the words "all," "some," and "none." She explained that the three words were qualifying words, words that are used when you want to qualify or limit something. I wondered how this bit of

"knowledge" would help children with reading!

In a system relying on basal readers, the sound/word/skills approach to reading begins for many children in kindergarten. One teacher that I observed was writing a letter to a child on a large sheet of paper as the children dictated what they wanted to say. Sadly, the children's flow of ideas was constantly interrupted as the teacher had them try to tell her what consonants some of the words began with and what punctuation to use. It seemed to me, as it must have to the children, that writing the letter was a vehicle not for communicating a message of caring and concern to the child receiving it, but for teaching beginning sounds and the use of periods.

What I have described is what takes place across the School District in the 55 minutes a day designated as "reading." You will note how little of what I saw involved reading from a book. Although every child probably does some reading of a story in the basal most days, in many cases this represents a small portion of the allotted time. The balance is devoted to phonics (letter/sound relationships) or to "skills" such as those I saw being taught and practiced.

Basals are built upon a step-by-step approach to teaching children to read. Reading is broken down into identifying words and teaching a hierarchy of skills. The focus is on going from the parts to the whole, i.e., from sounds to words and from words to sentences.

Because the basals begin with short words and short sentences which publishers consider to be easiest, they also begin with passages that are short on meaning and interest. There isn't a lot you can do with the eight words (I,we,can,help, go,you,not and will) used in one basal to construct a "story." New words are introduced before children meet them in their reading, they are taught out of context, and it is a rote learning process. Only a few words are introduced at a time and stories are limited to known words. Even when the work of children's authors is used, it is modified to use only the vocabulary that the children have been taught. Such control of the vocabulary leads to basal stories that are dull and less meaningful.

The teacher's manuals for the basals, with their explicit instructions, create the impression that they are soundly based in scientific research and that everything in them must be taught and in the prescribed order. In fact, there is no research which validates these implied claims. Beyond that, basals have dominated reading instruction nationally for more than 40 years. As a teaching tool they have failed. One of the major criticisms of public education is that students can't read or read poorly. In addition, there are gloomy statistics of non-promotion, dropouts, and those who graduate unable to function in the work world. All of this should certainly raise questions and cause school districts to examine their reliance on the basal.

A MIXED MESSAGE

At professional meetings and other gatherings in Philadelphia this year, teachers have often voiced concern and discontent with the way they are teaching children to read. Many believe that reading should be taught by using more of the wonderful books written for children in addition to, or instead of, the basals. Unfortunately, they feel constrained. Some speak of needing official permission. Some have run into opposition from their principals. Others feel that it is impossible to balance the demands of the sys-

tem with a reading program based, even in part, on literature.

It was hard to understand what was holding teachers back. The School District has a guide for teachers which clearly indicates that literature is central to the teaching of reading. A diagram places literature squarely in the middle with spokes going to such other parts of the curriculum as sustained silent reading and skills of thinking and learning. I have often heard top level administrators state that literature is at the heart of the curriculum.

The elementary school report card turned out to be the crux of the problem. Its message is that it is the basal with its skills and drill that is central to the reading curriculum. Marking guidelines spell out specifically with charts the mark (A,B,C,D & F) associated with specific grade levels of basal readers. Also, the report card has spaces requiring teachers to record the "basal reading level" and the "basal reader publisher and series."

For students to advance through the basal readers, they must pass the publisher's tests which concentrate on phonics, grammar and vocabulary. This forces teachers to drill students on this material. Comprehension is tested too but, judging by the number of test items devoted to it, publishers consider it less important!

Use of the basals consumes the time allotted to reading. Complaining teachers are urged to spend less time by skipping stories and skills. However, teachers are held accountable for their students' scores on the basal tests. There is, therefore, risk and difficulty connected with a decision not to plod through the basals page by page.

Many teachers do want to use literature to teach reading, at least part of the time. They want to read good literature to children. They want to have books appealing to a wide range of interests available to children in the classroom and the school library. These teachers face the obstacles already discussed, but there is also a system-wide shortage of literature books. Most classrooms have very few and library collections need bolstering and updating. More money should be allocated for this purpose. Also, if elementary schools switched the thousands of dollars they spend on workbooks to literature, they would have a good start on stocking their classrooms.

USING MORE LITERATURE

There are teachers in various schools who are experimenting with using literature to teach reading a couple of days a week. I visited a third grade class that was about to read a story about a child who spends a joyful day with her grandfather every other week. To get the children thinking about what they already knew about the topic of the story, the teacher asked them to think of a special person in their lives and what they do together. Many children named a close relative. Then they spent a few minutes writing in their journals about their special person and what makes him/her special. The teacher read the beginning of the story about Sadie and her grandfather rising early and going outside for a walk. The teacher stopped to ask the students where they thought Sadie and her grandfather were going. They made their guesses and then they read to find out if they were right. Note the difference in approach. The introduction to the story was designed to help the children draw on their own store of knowledge, understand the story, and be sensitive to its meaning. No questions were asked that had single right answers.

There is probably general

agreement on the goals of a quality reading program. Children should be motivated to read so that they become life-long readers. They should become skillful and fluent and comprehend well. To achieve these goals, literature capable of convincing students that reading is worthwhile and fun must become a much more significant part of all children's school experience. In addition, teachers must work with students on the basis that reading is a process of deriving meaning from the text. Readers comprehend a text by interacting with it. No text completely explains everything. Readers bring their prior knowledge to bear as the children did with the story about Sadie. This helps them interpret the author's message.

It is time for a reexamination of how reading is taught in Philadelphia. Literature must play a much more important role. Major changes take time but there are steps that should be taken in the interim. Curriculum guides, manuals and staff development should encourage and assist teachers to incorporate much more literature into their reading programs. Schools should acquire more children's literature. Guides should be developed to help teachers use basals differently and more selectively. The assessments of children's progress should be modified to match what is being taught. Report cards should provide a way to let parents know how their children are progressing whatever reading materials are being used.

Four years ago, Philadelphia was at a place with writing that parallels where it is today with reading. Superintendent Constance Clayton undertook, with the Philadelphia Alliance for Teaching Humanities in the Schools, to develop and promote across the District a new way to teach writing which stresses as its purpose the communication of thoughts and ideas. The amount and quality of writing in the School District has increased dramatically. Reading needs the same kind of effort. It too requires new approaches and a revised focus. The results could be equally successful.

It is through reading, in and out of school, that students can enlarge their knowledge of the world, increase their vocabularies and become more proficient readers. They need to be stimulated, motivated and encouraged to read more. Good literature provides the key and must truly be at the core of the curriculum.

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RESTRUCTURING CHAPTER 1

For nearly 25 years, there has been a national recognition that schools serving high concentrations of students coming from low-income families need additional resources if they are to make meaningful efforts to help students achieve. Since 1965, school districts across the nation have been receiving Federal funds targeted for this purpose. The funds, originally identified as Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, are now known as Chapter 1 funds. Currently, Philadelphia receives $50 million annually. A recent assessment of the effectiveness of Philadelphia's expenditure of its Chapter 1 funds mirrors a national evaluation. While there has been sufficient improvement in achievement to merit continued funding, it is not enough to significantly increase the chances for successful lives of the children involved, nor is it reflective of the large investment of dollars.

In December 1987, a newly-formed Philadelphia Chapter 1 Task Force was charged with developing a plan for utilizing Chapter 1 resources in order to substantially increase their impact. The Task Force, under the leadership of Lionel Lauer, Associate Superintendent of the Office of Instruction, met a March 1, 1988 deadline and produced a report which charts a "two-year phase-in of a total re-structuring of the Chapter 1 Program."

The Chapter 1 Task Force believed that before it began to plan for making changes, it should identify the factors that have hindered Chapter 1's effectiveness. It drew on national sources as well as Philadelphia's own experience. Some of the factors were:

1. When students failed, schools sought to discover and remedy weaknesses within the children rather than looking for ways to change the school.

2. Because eligibility for Chapter 1 services was based on low test scores in reading and mathematics, children had to face failure before they could receive help or benefit from available resources. As a result, school districts focused on trying to help children catch up rather than using Chapter 1 resources to prevent failure from occurring.

3. Children who were given assistance had it withdrawn when they began to do better and scored higher on tests even though they continued to need the help to sustain their gains.

4. In an attempt to serve all the children needing help, people and materials were often spread so thin that the potential benefits were dissipated.

5. In trying to be sure that Chapter 1 programs met stringent Federal requirements, educational effectiveness was sacrificed for

assurance that programs would clearly be seen as over and above what is provided to regular school children and would therefore pass the audit. This has often led to children being pulled out for instruction that is not coordinated with what is being taught in their classrooms. As a result, children experiencing the greatest academic difficulty have to work simultaneously on two separate paths to learning.

6. Schools had remedial programs and services assigned to them by the central office without regard to their perception of their needs and then they simply had to utilize the services as well as they could.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chapter 1 Task Force made 24 recommendations for change. They are based on factors found to hold out the promise of success with low-achieving poverty children and also take into consideration the factors identified as hindering it. The recommendations refocus the Chapter 1 goals, the methods for reaching the goals, and the way success will be judged. In the past, the Chapter 1 goals have emphasized reading and mathematics improvement as measured by nationally standardized tests. In contrast, the Task Force's most far-reaching and important recommendation is to make the goal of Chapter 1 be "to enhance school success by contributing to promotion, high school completion, and dropout reduction." By couching the goal in terms of succeeding in the regular academic program, the focus is on the child's overall progress as measured primarily by his grades and whether he is promoted. Analysis of pupil progress becomes much broader and requires looking at many different things such as class size, continuity of instruction, and all the factors and forces influencing students' ability to learn.

The Task Force recommends that there be increased "decision-making authority, and responsibility for outcomes, at the level of the school." Change cannot be dictated from above. Staff members must participate in devising plans for their school if they are to feel ownership of the plan and participate enthusiastically in carrying it out.

Another recommendation is for "comprehensive staff development" provided on "a systematic and intensive basis." Ultimately it is what takes place in classrooms between students and teachers that makes the difference. There must be substantial staff development if there is to be significant improvement in student achievement in the regular academic program.

The Task Force recommends that the walls be torn down between Chapter 1 and other programs for low-achieving students, special education for the mildly handicapped, and the state provided remedial instructional program (TELLS). Then all available services could be integrated to meet children's needs.

There is a recommendation for strengthening the crucial link between the home and the school. Parents need assistance in learning what they can do to help their children at home.

Some of the Chapter 1 Task Force's recommendations have already been tried in Philadelphia as part of the School District's desegregation plan and its effort to raise achievement in the lowest-achieving, racially isolated schools. Some years ago, about 75 schools were targeted for improvement with intensive efforts focused on a smaller number.

I visited Waring Elementary School in North Philadelphia, one of these targeted schools. It used to be a school in which each teacher worked in isolation behind

the closed classroom door. Achievement scores were among the lowest in the city. The halls were barren of bulletin boards and any evidence of academic or other activities. There was little in which to take pride.

In the fall of 1984, Waring, with its enrollment of 400 Black and Hispanic students, was designated a Replicating Success School and it has been undergoing change ever since. The staff did a self-analysis and formed a School Improvement Council. The entire staff serves on the Council and many members serve in positions of leadership and responsibility. Waring worked to create a school climate conducive to learning by rewarding achievement and helping students develop self-esteem and school pride. The principal and the Council developed annual school plans, determining which problems to tackle and how to measure progress.

Waring has had intensive help. Creative, caring, skilled people came from the Replicating Success Office and now from its successor, the Priority One Office, for in depth work with the staff. Waring has been provided with time for staff members to do planning. Subject matter supervisors come regularly to work with teachers. There has been extra money for trips and for materials and supplies so, for example, classrooms can have their own libraries and children's achievements can be recognized with certificates, small prizes and hall displays.

SCHOOLWIDE PROJECTS

Early in the 1986-87 school year, Waring was one of eleven elementary schools which had at least 75% of its students coming from low-income families and could therefore be designated a "Schoolwide Project." That meant two very important things which were major departures.

1. Every child at Waring who needed Chapter 1 service was eligible to receive it. In Chapter 1 elementary schools that are not Schoolwide Projects, students have to be on a list of those scoring at or below the 49th percentile in reading or mathematics to be eligible for services. The lists dictate who can get service. As a result, a teacher with five students who don't understand fractions can get special help from the Chapter 1 math specialist only for the three children on the list. At a Schoolwide Project site all five can get service. This reduces complexity and frustration and is a great boon. Over the next two years, many more schools will become Schoolwide Projects and benefit similarly.

2. Waring was given an annual budget for the funds over and above its regular allotment and the school staff, rather than central administrators, decided how to use them. Based on its School Improvement Plan, the staff made decisions such as to prevent failure by adding an extra teacher to reduce class size for the youngest children, to add a math specialist, and how many full and part-time aides they wanted.

One of the decisions of the Waring staff was to release a teacher from her classroom so that there would be someone to work with "at-risk" students and to develop motivational projects. One project involves recreational reading and it has drawn students of all ages and abilities, staff members and parents. Last year, a huge map of the United States was mounted on a wall and all participants had a miniature sneaker with their name on it to chart their progress as they "jogged" across America. Young children had to read 90 books. Older students and adults had to read 1500 pages. 140 students completed the "trip" and received gold medals.

The staff of Waring, through its School Improvement Council, has developed and carried out plans which have improved the quality of instruction, the climate of the school and the degree of parent involvement. Teachers have become members of a team. They have built trusting relationships which enable them to share problems, develop solutions collaboratively, and in the process grow as professionals. Waring has become their school. Teachers have a part to play and have come to see that they make a difference.

One very important element seems to be missing from the Chapter 1 Task Force Report. While it stresses the importance of the interaction between teacher and student, the emphasis is on the process of teaching, ways for teachers to more efficiently and effectively do what they've been doing. The Report does not come to grips with the nationally recognized problem that children are not learning higher order thinking skills, that is, to construct meaning from what they read, to solve mathematical problems or to use analysis and synthesis in their learning. In too many classrooms across the system and the nation, but especially where children have evidenced difficulty in learning, the content of the curriculum is fragmented, dull, and divorced from that which creates motivation and a zest for learning. Children seldom experience the joy and excitement of reading good literature. They memorize dates, people and wars, but are not helped to understand the causes and meanings of historical events. Attention must be given to what is taught and how it is approached because these are vital components of securing meaningful change.

The School District of Philadelphia is to be commended for having the courage and the determination to re-examine its spending of Chapter 1 and other funds reserved for poverty children experiencing academic difficulty. The Chapter 1 Task Force Report provides the framework for very substantial and exciting change and improvement. Implementation of its recommendations and detailed plans is moving briskly. If the Task Force's blueprint were to be combined with an emphasis on higher order thinking skills and excitement in learning, there would be even greater reason to have hope that the School District's efforts will translate into success in school for Chapter 1 students and much improved prospects for their futures.

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