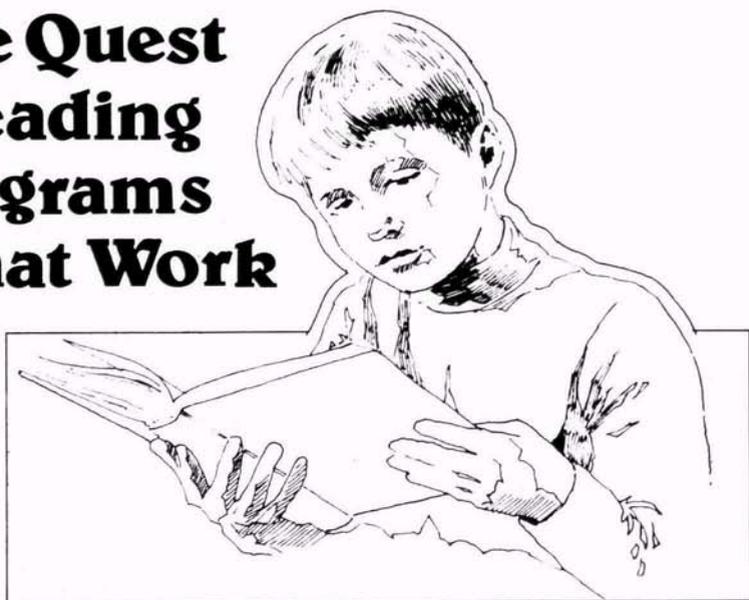


# The Quest for Reading Programs That Work



Shirley A. Jackson

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*Successful and widely adopted reading programs have similar characteristics which apparently contribute to their effectiveness.*

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What makes a reading program effective? The answer is becoming clearer as we seek to identify and provide information about successful practices.

A number of proven programs are listed in a catalogue published by the United States Office of Education called *Educational Programs That Work*.<sup>1</sup> Each of them must have been certified by a 22-member panel (half appointed by the Education Division of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; half appointed by the National Institute of Education) as having met six criteria:

1. Did a change occur?
2. Was the effect consistent enough and observed enough to be statistically significant?
3. Was the effect educationally significant?
4. Can the intervention be implemented in

another location with a reasonable expectation of comparable impact?

5. How likely is it that the observed effects resulted from the intervention?

6. Is the presented evidence believable and interpretable?<sup>2</sup>

In addition to being listed in *Educational Programs That Work*, programs approved by the joint review panel qualify for dissemination funds. These funds are available on a competitive basis

<sup>1</sup> *Educational Programs That Work*, Volume 4. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Winter 1977.

<sup>2</sup> These criteria are explained in more detail in a publication called *Ideabook*. See: Kasten G. Tallmadge. *Ideabook*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, October 1977.

to developers of programs who are willing to help another school system "adopt" and install their program. The objective is to transplant successful programs. Dissemination funds are also competitively available to persons who work as state facilitators, helping others become aware of the successful programs, and also assisting them in adopting these programs.

When developers of a program are successful in their request for certification by the joint review panel and in their competition for dissemination funds, they then face another kind of test: will other educators consider the program appropriate for use in their schools?

Among the programs that scored well on that test—those that have been most widely adopted and successfully implemented—are:

1. *Project Catch-up*, Newport Beach, California (139 adoptions; 32 states and two territories).

2. *Pegasus-Pace*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (80 adoptions; 9 states).

3. *Reading, English Rotation Project*, Thomson, Georgia (60 adoptions; 11 states).

4. *New Adventures in Learning*, Tallahassee, Florida (59 adoptions; 6 states).

5. *School Volunteer Development Project*, Miami, Florida (53 adoptions; 14 states and Guam).

6. *Hosts Corporation*, Vancouver, Washington (50 adoptions; 10 states).

7. *Learning to Read by Reading*, Jamestown, California (42 adoptions; 10 states).

8. *Glassboro Right to Read*, Glassboro, New Jersey (31 adoptions; 4 states).

9. *Systems Directed Reading*, Richardson, Texas (23 adoptions; 23 states).

10. *Alphaphonics*, San Francisco, California (15 adoptions; 15 states).

When one analyzes these programs, certain characteristics appear repeatedly. These characteristics, which apparently are associated with effectiveness in reading instruction, are:

1. There is a structured curriculum with hierarchical sequencing stated in behavioral objectives with instructional activities, materials, and tests keyed to stated objectives.

2. The program is individualized to accom-

modate specific skills needs and varied learning patterns with a heavy focus on direct teaching of decoding skills.

3. Trained auxiliary support staff is used such as reading specialists, teacher aides, and parent volunteers. Structured, well-planned coordination exists between support staff and the regular teacher.

4. Grouping of students is accomplished through multiple methods.

5. There exists the belief that students can achieve, and the school environment is the responsible entity for assuring student achievement. Varied strategies are utilized to involve parents.

6. There are varied reinforcement and frequent repetition strategies.

7. There is positive and immediate reinforcement of instruction.

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*"... one thing seems certain. A successful reading program is not a static one, but one in a continuous state of change, growth, development, and refinement."*

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8. There is a cumulative, consistent, varied testing program.

9. There is structured and frequent monitoring of student progress.

10. There is a well-defined program articulation and pupil progress system.

11. Reading is interrelated with other basic skills.

12. A literature/reading enjoyment component is a part of the program.

13. Varied approaches to teaching reading are utilized with emphasis on diagnostic teaching.

14. At least 30 to 45 minutes a day is spent on teaching reading.

15. Staff development is directly related to instructional program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

It may appear from what I have said that comparing effectiveness of reading programs is a fairly clear-cut process. Of course, it is really not

Figure 1: Sample Information from *Educational Projects That Work*—Project: The Glassboro Right-to-Read Project

● Description

The Glassboro Right-to-Read Project is an individualized diagnostic/prescriptive reading program based on a district assessment of staff and community needs. The performance goal is to raise the reading level of pupils 1.5 years in an eight-month instructional period. Children are placed at their instructional reading level and given individualized teaching at that level. The project uses various forms of classroom organization to allow for flexibility and individualization.

● Materials used

The diagnostic battery includes criterion-referenced testing, a measure of potential, an informal reading inventory, a readiness measure, and a kindergarten screening. A variety of instructional materials are used. The project provides *A Guide to Program Planning*, *A Guide to Program Implementation*, and *Guess Who's Coming to School?*—a guide to parent and community involvement.

● Service available

Awareness materials are available; visitors are welcomed by appointment (schedule published in the fall); training is conducted at the project site (adopting site pays only their own costs); training is conducted out-of-state (exemplary project staff costs must be paid for); project staff may be able to attend out-of-state conferences (expenses must be paid).

● Descriptors

Diagnostic/Prescriptive Reading  
Parent-Community Involvement  
Staff Development  
Needs Assessment

● Target audience

All students, pre-K through 3.

● Financial requirement

Start-up costs: \$21.73 per learner per year if a reading specialist is hired; \$5.73 per learner per year if a reading specialist is already under contract.

Maintenance: Reading specialist salary and/or substitute pay for release time unless otherwise provided.

● Program evaluation

First year of program implementation—2.14 years growth in an eight-month instructional period.

Second year of program implementation—1.52 years growth in an eight-month instructional period.

● Contact Dorothy E. Wriggins, Carpenter St. and Bowe Blvd., Glassboro, NJ 08028. USOE JDRP Approval: 9/18/74, JDRP Number: 74-93.

that simple. As we search for the most appropriate ways to determine how well particular programs are working, many problems and issues arise. I will mention only five.

1. Is a reading program automatically successful when almost all of its pupils are reading at or above grade level no matter what the preconditions are? Since by definition everybody cannot read at grade level, what is an acceptable measure of a program's "success?"

2. Is a reading program that is successful today necessarily considered successful in perpetuity? When is it no longer successful, and who declares it so?

3. Can a successful reading program actually be transplanted, intact, to an entirely different setting, situation, and population? How?

4. What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and growth potential? Should this relate to the criteria established for successful programs? Why or why not?

5. Is it important to emphasize program elements in the affective domain since one is unlikely to get a cognitive read-out on a "better adjusted" child? How does one definitively measure an improved self-concept? Is the focus on the affective domain a valid concern in structuring a successful reading program though most measures in these areas are imprecise and also will not translate into cognitive gains?

There may be many unanswered questions regarding how to structure successful reading programs. However, one thing seems certain. A successful reading program is not a static one, but one in a continuous state of change, growth, development, and refinement. Maybe, in light of this, there are no successful reading programs, only programs in a continuous quest for success. <sup>97</sup>



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