

Begin Reading Inservice with Math Teachers

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After many years of conducting inservice programs in reading for secondary teachers, I believe the right place to begin such instruction—to have it really make a difference—is with mathematics teachers.

Nobody ever begins with the math teachers; typically, we begin with English and social studies teachers, and typically that's about as far as we go. But there are many advantages in initiating reading inservice with math teachers. First, they are very concerned about reading skills in the secondary school. Many of them believe their good instruction does not show up on standardized tests because students can't read well enough to know which math operation they're being asked to perform.

Second, mathematics textbooks are lean in narrative prose. One series even notes in the teacher's manual that "reading has been eliminated." As a result, math teachers have not had years of trial and error experience with general reading; they have few, if any,

strategies for assisting students with reading problems.

Third, math is full of reading tasks that are not typically found in other content areas. For example, the student reading a mathematics discussion must constantly switch from word symbols to math symbols. Another difficulty is that print does not always proceed from left to right in a regular manner. It requires constant shifts of the reader's eyes and attention from the words to the diagram or figure and back again. These two idiosyncrasies illustrate math teachers' need for knowledge of the reading process and reading strategies.

Fourth, math teachers understand and learn the reading process *easily*. All reading theories are based on understanding and using a code, and teaching codes are the mathematics teacher's greatest strength.

Finally, there are as many myths about math teachers and reading as there are about English and social studies teachers and reading. Math teachers aren't "supposed" to be reading teachers! Yet when the math faculty starts teaching reading in their classrooms, the rest of the content teachers are virtually shamed into doing so. ■

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