

## Reading

PAT CUNNINGHAM

### How Should Poor Readers Be Taught?

Poor readers are again the focus of conversation and concern as educators respond to reports suggesting a common curriculum for all students and to research claiming that poor readers are given qualitatively different instruction than that given to good readers. This research suggests that: (1) Poor readers are often given material that is relatively harder for them than the material good readers are given. (2) Poor readers spend more instructional time on isolated words and phonics and less time on contextual reading. (3) Poor readers read more orally and less silently than good readers. (4) Teachers correct more errors made by poor readers, usually without giving them time to self-correct. With good readers, teachers ignore most errors that don't affect meaning and, when they do correct,

tend to allow time to finish the sentence so that any meaning change is evident to the reader. (5) Little attention is directed to meaning or story line in poor reader groups.

The call for a common curriculum and the research showing that poor readers get qualitatively different reading instruction have led some educators to suggest that all students be placed in the grade-level book, regardless of ability. We tried this. We placed all children in the same book and gave them all the same instruction. Some learned and some didn't. To help those who were failing we gave differential instruction, but we weren't sure what to change for which children.

Currently, we are developing a science of reading education. We know,

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for example, that just as all plants need sun and water, all children need both a decoding and a meaning emphasis in their reading instruction. We know that all children should learn to read silently and that they can't learn this if all their instruction emphasizes oral reading. We also know that good readers are placed in books easier for them than the books poor readers are placed in, and that readers grow when placed in material they can read. It is now our task to develop a curriculum for poor readers that will ensure that they get the right amounts of all the essential elements they need to grow as readers.

For specific principles that should apply to all readers and variations for poor readers, see R. L. Allington, "The Reading Instruction Provided Readers of Differing Reading Abilities," *Elementary School Journal*, (1983): 548-59.

## The Principalship

ROLAND S. BARTH AND REBECCA B. VAN DER BOGERT

### What is a Principals' Center?

If principals have such extraordinary influence over the quality and character of their schools, then there is good reason to support them in developing their many abilities. Like other professional inservice programs, principals' centers seek to do just that. As we talk with visitors from other centers we are struck by both their strength of common characteristics and by their immense diversity. While there is no orthodoxy, no "model" of a principals'

center, there does seem to be a loose constellation of assumptions on which many centers rest. Most people would probably agree that:

- The principal or headmaster is a central variable in determining the quality of a school.
- It is possible for most school heads to be effective educational leaders as well as building managers.
- The role of the principal, the nature of the job, and the context of the

school are all changing rapidly, becoming more complex and problematic.

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