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ABSTRACT

Funded in 1971 under Title III, Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the teacher exchange program to improve reading instruction was designed as a 3 year project. The thrust of the program ranged from creating awareness of and interest in good teaching practices to helping instructors implement these practices in their own classrooms. Building on another ESEA Title III program, planners designed the Upper Cumberland Reading Project to: (1) address the needs of 13 Appalachian counties in Tennessee; (2) demonstrate teaching methods which could be used with basal programs and in self-contained classrooms; (3) require no expenditures for materials or equipment; (4) demonstrate approaches for teaching reading which could be used after the project ended. The actual exchange program had 3 stages: (1) itinerant teachers from the 2 exchange centers spend 1 day visiting participating teachers; (2) during the next 5 days, participating teachers visited the 2 demonstration schools; and (3) on the last 2 days of an exchange, participants returned to their own schools and worked with the ESEA Title III itinerant teachers to implement instructional practices observed at the centers. The 5 findings, measured by the Stanford Achievement Test, indicated that the ESEA Title III pupils made significantly greater gains in reading than did control pupils.
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**A Model for Diffusing Exemplary Teaching Practices
In a Disadvantaged Rural Region**

**A Paper To Be Presented at the Nineteenth Annual Convention
Of the International Reading Association**

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A Model for Diffusing Exemplary Teaching Practices
In a Disadvantaged Rural Region

A teacher-exchange program based on models of the change process is helping improve reading instruction in 13 Appalachian counties of Tennessee.

Funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the program has five phases which correspond to steps in the change process identified by Rogers (3) and others. These range from creating awareness of and interest in good teaching practices to helping instructors implement these practices in their own classrooms.

The project grew out of another ESEA III regional program which failed to attract widespread interest. Building on lessons from that program, planners designed the Upper Cumberland Reading Project to:

1. Address a vital need of the region. (Data from the only coordinated area-wide testing program in the 13-county rural-small town region, conducted in 1969, revealed that, as a group, Upper Cumberland pupils ranked well below state and national norms on reading-related subtests of the Stanford Achievement Test.)

2. Demonstrate exemplary teaching methods which could be used with basal programs and in self-contained classrooms common to the region.

3. Require no expenditures for unusual published materials or instructional equipment. (The Upper Cumberland have one of the lowest per-capita income rates in Tennessee and a corresponding low level of local funding for education. An innovative reading program heavily dependent on expensive materials or equipment would have almost no chance of being continued by local systems after phaseout of ESEA III funding, which usually continues only three years.)

4. Demonstrate approaches to the teaching of reading which could be carried on by individual teachers after the end of the Title III project and within the financial and programmatic constraints of their local schools.

Change theory was used as the basis for a working program designed to meet these goals. Incorporated into the program were the following steps (2), common to most change models:

1. Awareness
2. Interest
3. Trial
4. Evaluation
5. Adoption.

One of the most widely-quoted pieces of research into how people accept new ideas involved farmers. This study (1) showed that the farmers became aware of and interested in new agricultural practices through

information communicated by the mass media. When it came, however, to personal involvement with the innovations--their trial, evaluation of their usefulness, and finally their adoption on a permanent basis--farmers tended to rely on personal advice from individuals they knew and trusted.

This research emphasized the distinction between dissemination and diffusion, terms sometimes used interchangeably when discussing effecting educational change. In this paper, "dissemination" is defined as communicating information about new practices, often through mass media or large-group conferences. "Diffusion," on the other hand, is defined as helping a teacher implement new practices in her school and classroom, regardless of local shortcomings and problems. Diffusion thus implies a one-to-one relationship between a visiting educator and classroom teacher, with the former "getting one's hands dirty" demonstrating new practices, similar to the relationship between agricultural extension agent and farmer during the last three stages of the change process.

The outgrowth of the planning discussed in the preceding paragraphs was the regional ESEA III project herein described, which was approved for three years beginning June 15, 1971. Two elementary schools in the region were designated as demonstration centers with three ESEA III personnel assigned to each school, a center director and two itinerant reading teachers. Supervisors of instruction in the

region's counties were asked to nominate teachers in grades 1-6 to visit the centers on a structured basis. To permit a longitudinal evaluation of demonstration school pupils involved in the program and to encourage participation by teachers on both the intermediate and primary levels, grades one and four were emphasized the first year of the project, two and five the second, and three and six the third.

Participating teachers first were mailed a collection of printed material designed to acquaint them with project procedures and with some generally accepted approaches to teaching reading. Included were the following pamphlets from the National Reading Center:

1. "What is a Good Reading Program?"
2. "What About Reading Failure?"
3. "Reading and Spelling"
4. "Grade Levels and Test Scores: What Do They Mean?"
5. "Approaches to the Teaching of Reading"
6. "Visual Problems and Reading"
7. "Dyslexia"

Although originally intended for a lay audience, the pamphlets were deemed helpful for Upper Cumberland teachers, a number of whom lacked college degrees or were teaching outside their areas of certification. This situation was especially true for Title I ESEA reading teachers.

Included in the orientation material was a list of performance objectives for exchange teachers. These focused on the five steps in teaching a basal reading lesson, as identified by Spache (4), plus

instructional activities and teacher-made materials to supplement basal lessons. The materials included a unit on the Upper Cumberland region, written by the project staff and designed to make pupils more aware of the history and scenery of their own region and more conscious of their cultural heritage.

The actual exchange program had three stages:

1. Itinerant teachers from the two centers spent one day visiting teachers selected to participate in exchanges. This stage was designed to heighten the latter's awareness of and interest in the Title III program and to acquaint the itinerant teachers with new pupils and new school and classroom routines.

2. During the next five school days, participating teachers visited the two demonstration schools. There they observed the center directors teaching reading and also discussed with them good instructional practices, especially as identified in the project's performance objectives for teachers.

3. On the last two school days of an exchange, participants returned to their own schools and worked with the ESEA III itinerant teachers in implementing instructional practices observed at the centers.

While exchange teachers were at the demonstration centers, the itinerant teachers acquainted the teachers' "back-home" pupils with a number of supplementary activities and materials in use at the centers. These included the language experience approach (as a supplement to a

basal lesson, not as a replacement for it), the Upper Cumberland unit, and a number of teacher-made instructional games. When the participants returned home, they often found their pupils requesting activities and materials which the exchange teachers had observed at the demonstration centers.

Exchange teachers were encouraged to participate in on-going teaching and planning at the centers. Center directors usually had reading classes each morning and then worked directly with visiting teachers each afternoon. An exception was the fifth and final day visitors were at the centers. That entire day was spent in making copies of instructional games and materials for visitors to take home. This proved to be an especially popular part of the program, since many teachers in the region had few supplementary materials to use with their basal texts. The ESEA III staff had to guard, however, against visitors' regarding these materials as an end in themselves and not as a means of reinforcing reading skills and pleasures.

The project also provided a follow-up specialist to help former participants implement the final step in the change process--adoption of new practices. During the third stage of an exchange, participants had been encouraged to try, evaluate and begin the adoption of exemplary teaching practices in their own classes. This work was continued by the follow-up specialist. Some time after an exchange, this specialist visited former participants in their home schools. She previously had

become acquainted with them at the centers and had discussed the purpose of her visit. She asked that they concentrate as much as possible on teaching reading during the one or two days of the follow-up visit, with emphasis on the performance objectives listed by the project for exchange participants. Former participants were asked to do as much teaching as possible, with the follow-up specialist acting as an advisor and occasional demonstrator.

Exchange and follow-up activities thus paralleled the five steps of change models. Mailing background material and the first day's visit by an ESEA III itinerant reading teacher helped create awareness and interest about generally accepted reading practices. (The project did not emphasize any dramatically innovative approaches to teaching reading.) During the participants' five days at the centers, awareness and interest again were stressed, and visitors were encouraged to try the demonstrated practices and materials in a non-threatening environment outside their own locality. As already noted, they later were encouraged to try and to evaluate these practices in their own classrooms while working with ESEA III itinerants during the final two exchange days. Finally, help in adopting the practices on a permanent basis was given by both the itinerants and the follow-up specialist.

From the visitors' first contact with the Upper Cumberland Reading Project to the final visit by the follow-up specialist, emphasis

gradually changed from disseminating information about acceptable teaching practices to diffusing these practices in classrooms throughout the region. The project thus sought to help meet an identified need of the Upper Cumberland while contributing to Title III ESEA's national goal of promoting educational change.

Acceptance of the project exceeded expectations. Such a program was unprecedented in the region, and there was some doubt about the willingness of teachers to leave their classrooms for extended periods and to travel up to 120 miles each day; however, more teachers asked to take part in exchanges than the project could accommodate. During the program's three years, approximately 150 teachers participated in exchanges. An additional 500 took part in a series of summer workshops held at one of the center schools.

Although the final evaluation report for the project remains to be written, interim assessment at the end of 1971-72 and 1972-73 indicated that the project had achieved or was within reach of all its objectives.

Evaluation has been in terms of achievement of ESEA III pupils at the two demonstration schools, congruence between objectives for visiting teachers and their classroom performances after completing the program, and satisfying open objectives about producing materials for use in the region. Testing was carried on in the demonstration schools to assess the effectiveness of teaching methods being demonstrated. A pre-post design was used, with objectives stated for

each year and for the entire three years of the project. Reading achievement scores of demonstration school pupils were compared with those of a control group in a neighboring, non-participating county. Although there is some dispute about the use of nationally normed tests with culturally disadvantaged children, the Stanford Achievement Test was chosen for the project evaluation to permit comparison with results of the 1969 area-wide testing program important in assessing needs during development of the reading project.

Nominal-level data on performances of exchange teachers were gathered through self-assessment by participants and post-exchange observation of a sample by one of the center directors.

In summary, major evaluation findings during the first two years of the project were as follows:

1. In each of the years, ESEA III pupils made significantly greater gains on all SAT reading subtests than did control pupils.
2. Pupils' expected grade-level loss, as indicated by the 1969 area-wide testing program, was cut on the average by 50 percent in each of the project's first two years.
3. The percentage of ESEA III pupils reading at grade level, as measured by national norms for the SAT, almost tripled during the two years.
4. Project pupils averaged 80 percent correct answers on a locally-made criterion-referenced test, designed to measure mastery

of reading skills and based on performance objectives given in the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development.

5. Exchange teachers successfully accomplished an average of 80 percent of the specified performance objectives after completing their participation in the project.

Analysis of covariance and chi square were used to test for significance of evaluation data, with the .05 level established in advance as acceptable. This level of significance was attained or exceeded for all objectives which could be measured during the first two years of the project.¹

Final evaluation data will be lacking until the summer of 1974. It nevertheless seems safe to conclude on the basis of available information that:

1) Models of the change process can provide the theoretical framework for an effective program to diffuse generally acceptable teaching methods throughout a rural region.

¹For additional information, see original project proposal and annual evaluation reports submitted to ESEA III Program Director, Tennessee Department of Education, Cordell Hull Building, Nashville, Tennessee 37219.

2) The Upper Cumberland Reading Project has successfully demonstrated the use of such a diffusion program to improve the teaching of reading in a disadvantaged area of Appalachia.²

²The Upper Cumberland Reading Project will end June 14, 1974. Until then, its mailing address is P. O. Box 37, Baxter, Tennessee 38544. Inquiries after this time may be addressed to the Tennessee State Department of Education (see above); Douglas Norman, 1575 Hills Dale Drive, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501; or Ralph Balyeat, Nashville Urban Observatory, Metropolitan Office Building, Nashville, Tennessee 37210.

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