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J. Harvey Littrell

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Should a reading course be required for secondary teacher certification?

Secondary school teachers' attitudes toward a reading course requirement for certification

by J. Harvey Littrell

Do secondary school teachers and administrators believe that knowledge about the teaching of reading is important to them? Do they believe such knowledge is important enough that a course in reading should be required for secondary teachers?

The answers to these two questions provide important information for decision-making. There are state committees presently in the process of making decisions about certification requirements in reading for secondary teachers. Nineteen certifying bodies have faced this question and have decided that either some or all secondary teachers should have experiences in reading. This means that at least 31 others are either facing the issue or will be in the future. Teacher education college faculties are making decisions about their responsibilities in preparing secondary teachers in reading. Teacher Associations must make decisions about their position on the issue.

To help educators with their decision-making a study was conducted in Kansas to determine the attitudes of secondary school personnel toward courses in teaching reading and toward certification requirements in reading. The subjects were 232 teachers and administrators employed in 17 Kansas secondary schools. To obtain subjects the investigator secured permission to attend and collect data at six in-service education meetings held at various locations in the state.

The subjects taught or worked in ten teaching areas. About three-eighths of these participants were in their first five years of teaching. Only 37 percent of the participants had received credit in a course in teaching reading, and of these, about one-half were Language Arts teachers.

About one-third of the subjects were in Language Arts (English, speech, foreign language, library). Since some states have singled out Language Arts teachers from teachers in other areas in their decision-making about certification requirements, the information obtained in this study has been reported separately for teachers in Language Arts and those in other areas.

For the purpose of assessing the subjects' attitudes toward the value of a reading course for teachers, they were asked, "Do you believe that secondary school teachers would benefit from having a course designed to teach them how to help secondary school students with reading?" The responses to this question are given in Table 1.

Table 1.

Subjects reactions to the question, "Do you believe that secondary school teachers would benefit from having a course designed to teach them how to help secondary school students with reading?"

Reaction	Lang. Arts	%	Other Areas	%	Total	%
No	1	1%	9	6%	10	4%
Yes, if prior to teaching experience	24	34%	50	31%	74	32%
Yes, if after teaching experience	27	39%	79	49%	106	46%
Yes, under conditions, listed	18	26%	22	14%	40	17%
No response	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%

Of the 232 subjects, 220, or 94 percent, believed a course in reading would be beneficial. Two participants did not reply. The response of 10 subjects, or 4 percent, was that the course would not be of benefit. The 40 respondents who answered, "Yes, under certain conditions," listed 45 conditions. Their responses can be summarized as follows: 16 participants said the course would be of value **both** before and after teaching experience; 11 replied the course would be of value if it pertained to the subjects the teacher taught; 13 thought the course would be of value **either** before or after teaching experience. There were 5 miscellaneous answers which did not pertain to the question. Participants from both Language Arts and Other Areas were highly favorable toward courses in teaching reading.

The subjects apparently believed a course in teaching reading would be beneficial to them. Did they believe such a course should be required for certification? To obtain an answer to this question, the participants were asked to react to a series of statements. Statements 1 and 2 were concerned with a requirement to be met during teacher **pre-service** education. These statements were:

Statement 1: "Students preparing to teach in the secondary school should have a required course in reading during their undergraduate pre-service experiences."

Statement 2: (Presented to those who disagreed or were undecided about Statement 1.) "Students preparing to teach certain subjects (e.g. English, Industrial Arts, etc.) should be required to take a course in reading during their undergraduate pre-service experience."

The reactions of the subject to Statement 1 are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

Reactions of the 232 subjects to Statement 1.

Reaction	Lang. Arts subjects	%	Other Area subject	%	Total	%
Agree	56	80%	95	59%	151	65%
Undecided	10	14%	41	25%	51	22%
Disagree	4	6%	26	16%	30	13%

Sixty-five percent of the 232 subjects would require a reading course of all students preparing to teach in the secondary schools. The 81 participants who either were undecided or disagreed with Statement 1 were asked to respond to Statement 2. Their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Reactions to Statement 2 of the 81 subjects who were "Undecided" or "Disagreed" to Statement 1.

Reaction	Lang. Arts subjects	%*	Other Areas subjects	%**	Total	% of 232 Subjects
Agree	8	11%	35	22%	43	19%
Undecided	4	6%	20	12%	24	10%
Disagree	2	3%	11	7%	13	6%
No reply	0	0%	1	1%	1	0%

*Percent of the 70 Language Arts subjects

**Percent of the 162 Other Area subjects

In addition to the 65 percent who would require reading in the pre-service education of teachers, an additional 19 percent would require reading of those preparing to teach certain subjects. Twenty-four percent were undecided about such a requirement. Only 6 percent believed there should be no reading requirement in the pre-service preparation.

The 43 subjects who agreed that a course should be required of those preparing to teach certain subject areas were asked to list the areas. Their list included all of the major teaching areas. However, Language Arts and Social Studies were named the most frequently.

The participants from Language Arts were somewhat more favorable to certification requirements for those preparing to teach than were the subjects from the Other Areas. The percent of acceptance for these two groups were 91 and 81, respectively.

The subjects in the study were all in-service teachers or administrators. Eighty-four percent of these in-service people believed that some or all pre-service teachers should have a course in reading prior to certification. To determine their attitudes toward a certification requirement for in-service teachers, the subjects were asked to react to the following statements:

Statement 3: "All teachers employed in a secondary school should be required to have a course in teaching reading."

Statement 4: (Presented to those who disagreed or were undecided about Statement 3) "Teachers of certain subjects should be required to take a course in teaching reading."

The reactions of the participants to Statement 3 are given in Table 4.

Table 4.

Reactions of 232 subjects to Statement 3.

Reaction	Lang. Arts subjects	%	Other Areas subjects	%	Total	%
Agree	49	70%	67	41%	116	50%
Undecided	7	10%	48	30%	56	24%
Disagree	12	17%	42	26%	54	23%
No reply	2	3%	4	6%	6	3%

One-half of the 232 subjects in the study agreed that a course in teaching reading should be required of all teachers in the secondary school. The 110 who were undecided or who disagreed with Statement 3 were asked to respond to Statement 4. Their reactions are given in Table 5.

Table 5.

Reactions to Statement 4 of the 110 subjects who were "Undecided" or "Disagreed" with Statement 3.

Reaction	Lang. Arts subjects	%*	Other Areas subjects	%**	Total	% of 232 subjects
Agree	14	20%	37	23%	51	22%
Undecided	3	4%	35	22%	38	16%
Disagree	4	6%	16	10%	20	9%
No reply	0	0%	1	1%	1	0%

*Percent of the 70 Language Arts subjects

**Percent of the 162 Other Area subjects

In addition to the 50 percent of the subjects who would require a course in the teaching of reading of all in-service teachers, another 22 percent would require a

course in reading for teachers of certain subjects. Sixteen percent of the subjects were undecided whether or not they would make such a requirement. Only 9 percent believed there should not be a requirement.

The 51 participants who agreed with Statement 4 were asked to list the subject areas. Every curriculum area was listed by one or more participants. English and Social Studies were named most frequently.

Ninety percent of the Language Arts participants agreed that all or some teachers should be required to have a course in reading for certification. Subjects in the Other Areas were 64 percent in agreement with such a requirement.

Summary

A survey of 232 Kansas secondary teachers and administrators was made to determine their attitudes toward courses designed to help them teach the reading skills needed by pupils in their classes. A predominate question to be answered was whether or not such a reading course should be required for certification. Ninety-four percent of the participants in the study believed a course in the

teaching of reading would be beneficial for teachers. The requirement of such a course for certification for all students preparing to be teachers was agreed to by 65 percent of the participants. An additional 19 percent would require a course in teaching reading of those preparing to teach certain subjects, particularly English and Social Studies. Fifty percent of the participants would require a course in teaching reading of all teachers employed in the secondary schools. An additional 22 percent would have this requirement only for those teaching certain subjects. English and Social Studies were named most frequently. A larger percent of the participants in Language Arts than of participants from the Other Areas were in agreement with such certification requirements as previously stated.

Teacher Certification Boards, college faculties planning curricula and teacher associations should be aware of the attitudes of secondary teachers toward courses preparing them to teach the reading skills needed by their pupils. Before making decisions it would be advisable for these groups to either replicate the study reported in this paper or develop other research techniques to determine the attitudes of the secondary teachers in their geographical areas, colleges or associations.

Right to read

Right to Read. A phrase that has been bandied about so much that many of us use it without thinking. Two points need to be remembered and implemented if we are to be at all successful with our work: (a) the project is to wipe out illiteracy, the inability to read **and** write. What we know about teaching those kids in academic trouble suggests that we'll do a better job if we combine our teaching of the two areas. They reinforce each other, which really speaks to the need to use integrated activities in more of our teaching. (b) While we're working with the kids who cannot read well, let's realize that these kids have, as Dr. Sheldon Schmidt of the University of North Dakota has noted, "... a right to **learn** even if they cannot read." If we can free them by providing this other right, we'll provide them with a higher self regard and increased energy and enthusiasm for other things good and wonderful—such as the 2 R's we're responsible for . . . ,

Joe Peterson
College of Education
Kansas State University