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²The refutational text and pretest/posttest measures are available from the author upon request.

LEADERS IN READING RESEARCH AND INSTRUCTION

Edited by

RICHARD ROBINSON, *University of
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AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. A. STERL ARTLEY Professor Emeritus, College of Education The University of Missouri-Columbia

Dr. Sterl Artley has had a long and distinguished career in the field of reading education. As a former president of the International Reading Association during its formative years, Dr. Artley's influence has had fundamental effect on the policies and programs of this organization. While his contributions are many and varied including numerous research projects, conference presentations, and professional articles, on various aspects of reading he is perhaps best known for his work on the preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers. He has long been known for his commitment to the classroom teacher's role in an effective reading program.

Q. What observations do you have about the current reading scene?

A. We have gone through so many ideas with regard to reading instruction. Currently, the emphasis seems to be on whole language based on what is believed to be a new emphasis on literature and writing. However, long before this idea became the "in" approach to the teaching of reading, good reading programs involved literature as well as writing. In fact, over twenty years ago I was

working with a program called "We Talk, Spell, and Write" which was based on many of the same tenets as whole language today.

Q. What do you believe will be the eventual outcome of the current debate regarding whole language?

A. If we follow the pattern that has been laid down in the past, this will run its course and something else will take its place. We have seen this happen with other movements in reading. I have a strong feeling that something else will take the place of whole language in due time. Each one of these movements has lasted about a ten year period and then has been replaced by something else. I often think of a quote from Constance McCullough relative to change in reading,

Much of the knowledge we have about the teaching of reading has developed by a curious and--in terms of the lives of students--wasteful pattern of extremes. We have learned a great deal about oral reading by having too much of it, about silent reading by neglecting oral reading, about extensive reading by neglecting intensive, about sight vocabulary by neglecting phonics, about phonics and speed by neglecting comprehension. In other words, an over-emphasis on certain aspects of a program almost invariably results in neglect of others, and thus change comes about as a reaction to existing programs Artley, 1981).

I think that statement is excellent.

Q. What do you consider to be some of the most significant positive changes you have seen over the years in reading instruction?

A. I would certainly note the importance of literature as a basis for a quality reading program. While we teach children to read we need to also supply them with the materials to read so that they can then apply what they have learned. Today's teachers are richly supplied with many examples of quality literature to read.

Q. Who are some of the individuals who have had the most influence on the teaching of reading?

A. Two of the most important were William S. Gray and Emmett Betts. Gray for his pioneering work at the University of Chicago in the teaching of reading and Betts on his early work in the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties. Guy Bond also did important work on the training of effective classroom teachers of reading. Nila Banton Smith with her book, *American Reading Instruction*, was also of great influence.

Q. How did you personally become involved in the teaching of reading?

A. I was teaching English in high school and the principal gave me the job of teaching reading. I quickly discovered that I did not know anything about reading. I contacted Emmett Betts who gave me a graduate assistantship which led into my doctoral work. I was his assistant for three years at Pennsylvania State University. My dissertation dealt with reading comprehension in older students.

Q. What do you see as being some of the major unsolved problems in reading today?

A. A major area of concern has been in the past and still is today the remediation of reading problems. This is especially true of young people who have been in school for awhile, such as high school students. We seem to have a great deal of criticism today about those who graduate and cannot read. Today we have different expectations from our students and have different students in class than we did in the past.

It's unfortunate that we in reading today are often bogged down dealing with such age-old problems as phonics vs. whole word, basal reader vs. whole language, when we should really be more concerned with the fundamental issues related to learning to read. These would include how to be an effective reading teacher, better ways to comprehend what is read, and the organization of reading programs at all levels.

Q. How would you say the teaching of reading has changed over the years?

A. If I could contrast what reading instruction was 30 or 35 years ago to what it is today it would probably be most noticeable in the availability of children's books for the modern teacher. We had no library in the one room county school I attended as a child. The problem for today's teacher is to know what to select from the great number of available reading materials.

Q. Reflecting back on your career in reading education what are some of the accomplishments you feel best about?

A. I would give some emphasis to the development of the Child Study Clinic here at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1947. This was the first clinic that emphasized more than just one aspect of the child. Our philosophy was to look at the total individual both in relation to their academic performance as well as their social and emotional development. This model for the study and remediation of children was to be followed later by others throughout the country. I also feel very good about the pre-service and in-service training of classroom teachers over the years in the teaching of reading. This program has had a major influence on the reading education both here in the state of Missouri as well as at the national level. The doctoral program has also been a very important aspect of our program. I had 49 doctoral students who have taken positions throughout the country.

Q. As a final question, what advice would you give to young faculty who are just beginning to work in the field of reading education?

A. I think it is extremely important for faculty to know the reading needs of students at various ages. This is to say, they should know the competencies needed for success in reading at any stage of development based on individual differences and interests.

I also believe they should know the field of reading, particularly what has gone on before. This is important because many of the questions being discussed today have been problems in the past. Hopefully, we can move beyond these traditional issues and progress to other more relevant concerns.

Q. What would you say to a faculty member about dividing their time between research and teaching?

A. I don't think you can separate the two. Research and teaching are not mutually exclusive of each other. Research adds to the qualities of a good teacher and the teacher sees areas in teaching that can be reflected in appropriate research.

We must not forget the service aspect of university work. You have a responsibility to the public at large by working with school districts on reading related matters as well as presenting at meeting on the national, the state, and the local levels. You can't separate teaching, research, and service -- they all go together.

And finally, the faculty member must not forget family responsibilities. That was one of the mistakes I made because I was so heavily involved in writing and speaking that I was inclined to neglect my family. You can very easily develop a workaholic attitude. This is a serious mistake. The good faculty member is able to balance their work with their family responsibilities.

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