

Northern Illinois University Document
Delivery



ILLiad TN: 278557

Journal Title: Reading Psychology

Volume: 10

Issue: 1

Month/Year: 1989

Pages: 85-88

Article Author: Lyndon Searfoss

Article Title: An Interview with Dr. Roach Van Allen

Imprint:

Call #: BF456.R2 R34

Location:

Item #:

CUSTOMER HAS REQUESTED:

Mail to Address

Norman Stahl (r0101298)
536 Kendall Lane
DeKalb, IL 60115

Notice: This material may be protected by
copyright law (Title 17 US Code)
Northern Illinois University
University Libraries (JNA)
DeKalb, IL 60115

**LEADERS IN READING RESEARCH
AND INSTRUCTION**

Edited by

LYNDON SEARFOSS, *Arizona State University, Tempe,
Arizona*

BOB W. JERROLD, *University of Georgia, Athens,
Georgia*

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ROACH VAN ALLEN

Professor Emeritus, College of Education
The University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona

Q. How did you become involved in education, in general, and reading education in particular?

A. Education was my destiny. My father was a teacher and school administrator. My mother was a teacher. She came from a long line of teachers and ministers that extends back before the Revolutionary War. I am a part of that continuity.

My early preparation was to be an English teacher, but I found out early in my career that I was better suited to teach young children in the elementary grades. My interest in reading education began to be highlighted while I was the Director of Curriculum Coordination in San Diego County, California. The staff there, under the direction of Dr. Cecil Hardesty, engaged in a long-range study of reading instruction beginning in 1956. Because of my previous experience of developing an integrated language arts program, including reading, in Harlingen, Texas, I was asked to develop a curriculum rationale for a program of reading/language instruction that rejected the basic premises of the basal reading programs. I was asked to stay away from my office for one month in order to concentrate on the assignment. During that time, I drew upon my experience and the works of others who

advocated a program that did not separate reading out of general language development. It was then that I began to identify those components of language that are required for literacy without making any distinction between reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Through a process of factor analysis, we developed a list of twenty experiences that were essential. This list of twenty formed the basis of the theoretical model for a language experience approach. After that experience, I was into reading education and have stayed there through the years that have followed.

Q. Who are the individuals who had an impact on your early career? Who has had an impact in your later career?

A. In my early teaching career I had an elementary principal, Miss Elva Fronabarger in Canyon, Texas, who had a profound influence on my teaching. She was an enlightened administrator who held weekly conferences with all the teachers to update us on recent literature and to focus on the mission of a teacher--to teach children rather than to teach subjects. Later I came under the influence of Dr. Henry J. Otto, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. He insisted, in the doctoral program, that I should write for teachers and children. Under his influence I began to write for professional journals in 1948. I was successful enough that I have been writing since that time and now have more than 300 entries in my bibliography.

The next person to have an impact on my professional career was C.E. Burnett. He was the superintendent in Harlingen. He required that every person joining the professional staff of the district engage in at least one year of a Child Study program (we offered three years). He felt very strongly that no one could really become a teacher if that person did not understand "how children learn." I coordinated that program and believed in it thoroughly.

In later years, I have been influenced by a multitude of persons who believed, as I did, that language for reading flows from within as well as from without. We believe that writing experiences are essential for the full development of reading skills and abilities. I was greatly involved in the First Grade Reading Studies sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education in

the middle sixties. It was during those studies that I met Dr. Harry T. Hahn of Oakland University, Michigan. He worked with me for a period of more than twenty years to refine and publish materials for teachers and children that undergirded a fully integrated language development program (now called by many a "whole language program"). During those years I was also associated with Bill Martin, Jr., and Leland Jacobs.

In the field of publishing, I have been influenced greatly by Andrew W. Bingham, President of Developmental Learning Materials Teaching Resources. Andy would not let me retire from writing. He invited me to become the senior author of a series of integrated language arts units for young children. This was after retirement from university teaching. Also, he asked me to coordinate and to write, with my wife, Claryce, a series of predictable language books. This has been a peak experience in my professional career.

Q. What are your non-academic interests?

A. At the present time, I am learning to weave. This interest is an extension of my interest in arts and crafts which I have engaged in for many years. My wife and I are interested in the Sun Cities Symphony and participate in the guild activities. We also travel and enjoy our family.

Q. What are your proudest accomplishments?

A. Of all the things that I have done, the one that stands out as being the most significant and one of which I am proud is the development of a theoretical model for a language experience program. This model has made possible the wide dissemination of my work and has formed the constraints for writing that keeps it from being a collection of "cute ideas."

Another accomplishment was the work with Dr. Russell Stauffer in the organization of the Language Experience Special Interest Group within the International Reading Association. This was the first special interest group formed and it still functions after about twenty years.

Q. How are today's and yesterday's leaders in reading education the same--different?

A. Frankly, I do not know any of the leaders today who are like those of yesterday. The ones that I know emphasize the "wholeness of language" and the impact of literature upon the reading program. All of us have been influenced by the discipline of linguistics and the psychology of learning. Those who are not under those influences do not deserve to be classified as leaders (although they do exist).

Q. What are the problems and pitfalls faced by reading education?

A. Reading education is too much of a political issue to be free to develop with what scholars in the field know and are able to do. Funding by government agencies and private foundations with an agenda to prove will continue to focus on "the best is in the past." The acquisition of educational publishers by large corporations has taken much of the influence of educational leaders out of publishing. The profit motive is paramount. Fortunately, a number of small publishers have sprung up to develop innovative and timely materials.

Q. Comments on the years ahead.

A. We are leaving too many of our youth behind in the reading curriculum. Not enough attention is being paid to the language and ideas of the learners as a launching pad for literacy development.

Electronics is entering the reading education field in a real way. All of us must try to understand the world in which our students live and avoid trying to teach "children who are not there anymore."

The present emphasis on early childhood development of language that will permit and promote reading and writing is paramount in the years ahead.

RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Edited by

RITA J. MARTIN, *Region 10 Education Center,
Richardson, Texas*

Guest Columnist

ELIZABETH B. HAHN, *Director, Marietta City Schools,
Environmental Education, Marietta, Ohio*

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

On the day the gerbils are first brought to reading center, Stephen rushed in, "I got a book at the library about gerbils. Can we read it? Can we?" Of course, but since the book is written for intermediate grades and Stephen is a beginning reader we read the book together with the rest of his group.

"Mrs. Hahn, just look at this little guy climb--and, look, if we put a tin can in here the gerbils use it for a tunnel."

One might ask, "What are gerbils doing in this reading center in the first place?" What is the rationale for my use of environmental education activities in the reading center? My rationale is based on two questions that all kids in reading center seem to be asking. The first question is, "What does reading have to do with this environment I live in anyway?" The other, "Gee, if I can't even make these little squiggly lines into words like other people, how can I have any effect on this world I live in?" These kids wanted to know the reading and world connection.

So, my job in reading center, as I view it, is to make reading fit into the real world and the real world fit into reading. To do this I, one, must promote ideas that are novel to the students so that they can develop their thinking skills. Two, I must promote excellent children's literature because it stirs a high level of response--it enchants, it angers, it saddens, and it, too, promotes thinking.