

U.S.

# Theodore Clymer, 77, Expert On Early Reading Education

By LIA MILLER AUG. 15, 2004

Theodore W. Clymer, an expert who successfully challenged many common myths of early reading education, died at his home in Carmel, Calif., on July 25. He was 77.

His death came after a long illness, said his daughter, Lorna Clymer.

In 1963, Dr. Ted Clymer made a big impact in the education community with his study on phonic generalizations. He analyzed 45 such generalizations commonly used by elementary teachers to teach children to read and found that only 18 of them were accurate more than 75 percent of the time.

The example often used to explain his study is "When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking," that is, when two vowels are next to each other in a word, the sound they make is the sound of the first one, as in "ee" in "fear." Dr. Clymer's study pointed out that there were many exceptions to these rules, as in this case of the words "bear" or "earn." He concluded, "Many of the generalizations that are commonly taught are of limited value."

John Manning, professor of literacy education at the University of Minnesota and one of Dr. Clymer's associates, noted that this study "flew in the face of the conventional wisdom."

Professor Manning continued: "There had been a long-held assumption that beginning reading should have a very intensive phonics component to it, where children would sound out words and learn these generalizations. This study really

shot that down and helped to change the way reading was taught."

In 1952, Dr. Clymer became a professor of elementary education and educational psychology at the University of Minnesota. He eventually became chairman of the elementary education department. His work centered on finding to improve teachers' methods, and he wrote many studies that put the well-established theories of educators in early reading to the rigors of scientific testing.

In 1965, Dr. Clymer founded the Reading Research Quarterly, a journal devoted to the latest research on reading.

Theodore William Clymer was born in 1927 in St. Paul and grew up in Hudson, Wis. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in science education in 1948. He earned his master's and doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota.

His first marriage ended in divorce. In addition to his daughter, Lorna, of Los Angeles, he is survived by his wife of 24 years, Genie Clymer; and his son, Brook, of Lake Arrowhead, Calif.

In the late 1960's, Dr. Clymer introduced a textbook series called Reading 360. The series was hailed as effectively putting into practice much of the latest research on reading instruction and was well received by teachers and eagerly adopted by many states as part of their curriculums. The series used vibrant colors and critically acclaimed literature by children's book authors, and were a clear departure in tone and style from their predecessors, like the "Dick and Jane" series of readers.

In 1970, he and his family moved to California, where for the next two decades he devoted himself full time to writing and editing textbooks. He also wrote several children's books that focused on world folklore, including "The Travels of Atunga" (1973) and "Four Corners of the Sky: Poems, Chants and Oratory" (1975).