

READING:

The Right to Participate

**TWENTIETH YEARBOOK OF THE
NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE**

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PRESENT AND FUTURE TRENDS IN COLLEGE READING
AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

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This is the twentieth NRC Annual Conference: which means that during the next year we will presumably come of age. In line with the general trend toward earlier maturation, we've already reached some kind of landmark in this organization. We've already had our history written. Dr. Lester Van Gilder did some empirical investigations of The National Reading Conference and wrote a history of the organization as a dissertation at Marquette University. So we now have our collective memoirs written at age twenty. I wonder what will be happening when life begins at forty for this organization.

The pace of professional activity seems to me to be quickening. This past year has been the busiest and most exciting year of my life. The many new professional colleagues I have met as visitors to my campus and on my visits to other campuses has given me a most graphic (and fatiguing) view of the rate of growth in our field. I have also been involved in planning sessions on the Right to Read Effort and the forthcoming White House Conference on Children and Youth. Besides giving me a chance to log too many hours of flying time in and out of Washington and to and from a number of colleges, my year's experiences have given me a kind of perspective on the field of reading and its place in higher education that I never had before.

Some of the trends I see developing in reading and in the rest of the educational enterprise seem to me to need examination, because they promise or threaten to make major alterations in our professional lives.

I want to discuss some of the trends I see, and to speculate a bit about what meaning they have for the future.

As you probably know the primary thrust of the Right to Read Effort is in the direction of a massive mobilization of national resources to upgrade reading performance through strengthening of current programs and through development of innovative, fail-safe, criterion-referenced, quality-controlled instructional systems. The Right to Read forum of the White House Conference on Children and Youth will next week pass on recommendations to the President for legislation to support and implement that concept. The growth of individualized instructional systems has some very far-reaching implications that I think are worth examining. I propose to look at what happens when we start thinking about instructional systems and the mass application of them in public education.

TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS

Some of the trends that are already visible are rather startling. First let's look at some trends in the development of the ways in which people get taught in an instructional system. By instructional system's I don't mean just software and hardware. I mean the whole instructional system; the school, the teacher, the society. Some of the components in this system are being changed rather radically. For example, you look at the development of instructional systems in education. We have a long tradition in which instruction has been imbedded in a medieval concept of a university, packaged up into courses, credits, and similar concepts. We are increasingly seeing instructional systems being devoted to situations where the need for specific instructional goals has become apparent and the instructional goals are taken as the starting point for the development of the instructional systems. The goals determine the nature of the instruction: staffing; software; hardware; and timing. This is a radically different approach.

When you look at the techniques by which instructional systems are created, again you have a new, radical shift. In the old days the teachers were selected by administrators. Teachers taught "content" in packages of information called courses. The materials were obtained by picking out a distinguished professor and having him write a book that would be acceptable to his colleagues. Now the development of instructional systems is quite different. Creation now starts with a master plan for the whole system, involving a large number of people in the planning and the carrying out of the system. It usually involves technique studies, differential sequencing studies, error rate studies, outcome studies, and many other steps in the careful production of a set of learning experiences. The product of all this is the result of much effort by many hands over a long time span.

The size of the necessary developmental efforts has resulted in

the growth of a new kind of entity in the educational enterprise. I refer to the new type of commercial and semi-commercial, profit and non-profit corporations which essentially take over the function of both teacher and materials. I'm thinking of such things as Systems Development Corporation, General Learning Inc., Westinghouse Learning Corporation, Learning Technology Inc., and Xerox Learning Systems. The relationship between such corporate and semi-corporate entities and the public and private institution is a very interesting thing to watch because it is becoming increasingly difficult to say where the private sector stops and where the public sector begins. This kind of relationship may get to be a real problem for some of us. For example, we may get into performance contracting in teaching reading at the college level. (If you want to have nightmares, think about that.) We're doing it in the elementary school. We're about to do it in the secondary school. Who knows?

Another trend is toward tremendously increased costs, and at a time when public support of education is in some danger because of shortage of funds. In the old days we got our materials in a relatively inexpensive way. That professor who was writing the textbook was maybe operating on a five hundred dollar advance from the publisher. Now, when instructional systems are created, it involves contracts with many people, usually with some institution or institutions. It involves consultants, editors, writers, production designers, testing and evaluation specialists, and all sorts of other people. It's a whole new sub-economy.

When you consider the techniques by which instructional systems are created, you see the need for all the complexity. For example, the steps that are necessary in the development of an effective instructional system are:

1. General development of the system design
2. Development of rationale for sub-systems or component parts
3. Development of instructional plan for each component
4. Developing the logic of instructional sequencing
 - a. ordering concepts
 - b. developing measures of difficulty
5. Determining optional difficulty for materials and tasks
6. Selection of techniques for producing materials or experiences
7. Technique Studies to determine optimal approaches
8. Error rate studies on materials and experiences
9. Evaluation of acceptability of techniques of training to teachers and students
10. Tryout across populations to determine generalizability of results
11. Outcome studies—comparisons with control groups or with other techniques, including criterion achievement studies
12. Revision based on formative and summative studies

The reason that this long process is expensive is not just that it involves a lot of people, but because it involves a longer and more expensive developmental process. For example, I have been involved in one rather primitive instructional system in which one of the pieces of it went through eight experimental editions and the developmental costs were fourteen times the publisher's usual developmental costs. So we see a fantastic explosion in the cost of producing instructional materials—a trend that really frightens publishers. I don't know if it frightens reading teachers.

Another trend is toward examining hardware, software, instructional services, personnel, and everything else in the instructional systems from the point of view of specifications rather than credentials. In the old days we would select people, materials, and hardware by looking at the qualifications of the people rather than the outcomes produced. Now we find ourselves asking things like the following:

1. Statement of objectives—observable outcomes are anticipated?
2. Criterion measures—procedures are available to measure the accomplishment of outcomes?
3. Specification of components—precise description of materials and procedures?
4. Learner prerequisites—specification of those for whom program is appropriate?
5. Teacher requirements—training necessary and specification of procedures to follow?
6. Evidence of reliability—(will it work everywhere every time?)
7. Estimates of time, cost, and cost-effectiveness?
8. Availability?
9. Documentation—factual or substantial support for statements made?

Another trend is toward more widespread participation in the development of instructional systems in reading and in other fields. I know of a situation where the development of one component in an instructional system involved systematic tryouts of material in New York, California, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Maryland, Iowa and Illinois. This involves a great deal of need for coordination of efforts, and sometimes results in a publishing company becoming responsible for the management of a whole set of related research projects—a new role for them.

TRENDS IN DELIVERY SYSTEMS

The second major category of trends I see are the delivery systems for instructional efforts; changes in the ways that we get the students and the system together. Again, let's look at the way instructional materials have been made available to students in the past. The publisher's representative talks to the professor and sends out a complimentary copy of the book. If the professor likes it, it is adopted. Now we have travelling consultants on instructional systems. The adoption

of an extremely expensive and large instructional system is a very complicated business. It takes a major contract proposal to get something like Dorset Industries taking over part of Texarcana schools, for example. It's a major event in the school system when that happens. It involves demonstrations and conferences. Many people are involved in those decisions. Many people have to live with the decisions after they are made. This is why I say changes in delivery systems may have real impact on your professional lives. Sometimes it even turns out that the resident consultant who stays on the scene and makes sure the thing works, tends to accumulate more political power than the principal used to have. The locus of responsibility for policy-making in the school or college may begin to shift.

There are also some other trends in the nature of delivery systems that have to do with the use of new instructional technology. For example, our schedules get very complicated. As soon as you start talking about modular packages or instructional units that are variable in length by individual, the old academic semester system becomes an obsolete concept.

You also get into radical changes in equipment and space needs, grading procedures, and screening of students. I think it's very clear that we are increasingly abandoning the notion of screening students to make sure that they have "the ability to go to college."

One major problem is the changing role of the teacher. The instructional materials in some systems do most of the teaching, and the teacher is out of a teaching role and into a management role.

The cost problem exists in the delivery system as well as in the development of materials. Costs charges range all the way from some situations in which instructional systems will save money (by having the students sharing books and doing only things they need) all the way up to computer assisted instruction terminals with their accompanying astronomical costs.

TRENDS IN SOCIETAL INFLUENCES ON EDUCATION

Trends in the development and delivery of new educational technology are interacting with other changes in the society and some subtle shifts in our national value systems. We have, for example, a very strong national outcry in education for accountability. Many people are asking questions about the cost of education and are demanding evaluation based on outcomes rather than program process costs. The cost-effectiveness factor is getting more and more important and we're going to have to start arguing for innovations in instructional programs on the basis of their ability to do a good job and to save money. College basic skills programs are going to be increasingly subject to the demand for cost-effectiveness considerations.

At the same time that we're getting pressure for specific outcomes, which I think leads us somewhat to a kind of predictable, rather struc-

tured learning situation, we are getting a very strong outcry for an increasing humanism in our institutions. We have the whole sensitivity training movement, the emphasis on relationships, and the rejection of materialism and technology that is characteristic of almost a whole generation. Add to that the revolt against size. Inevitably college reading programs are going to be influenced by these concerns.

We are also seeing in higher education a curious renewal of the old special-general education argument. I've been spending a lot of time on the campuses of new junior colleges and community colleges. They are having the old arguments all over again about nature and the role of higher education. You run into some really strange things. The dean who invites you to come to help them set up a basic skills program has one perception of the nature and role of the institution. When you get there it turns out the board has a totally different picture of the structure and role of their institution. The issue of technical versus general education is alive again. The old "two years of general education and two years of specialized education" compromise that we've all lived with for so long, is breaking down very rapidly. My instincts are on the side of the generalists in this argument but my prediction is that the technocrats are going to win out again, and that we are going to go increasingly to technical education.

In some places the demand for technical education produces some new institutions that our reading programs are not very well equipped to handle. We are not really well tooled up to do the things that need to be done to help the students who are in a welding curriculum. Our materials simply do not fit the needs of many students.

Another trend in higher education has to do with the constant pressure to "upgrade" institutions. The institution moves from a normal school to a state teachers college to a state college to a university. I was in a town in Iowa recently. I saw all four names of the institution on signs before I got to it. They changed their name so fast that they hadn't even taken down the signs. This constant change is giving some impetus to the creation of new institutions that start at the bottom of that process. Many people say we have to interrupt that system; that we need technical schools that are going to stay technical schools and where the "transfer faculty" doesn't always win the game and make a junior college into a four year college.

Another trend I see in higher education that inevitably is going to influence us is the potential end of the non-political nature of institutions of higher education. I see an increasing radicalization of both faculty and students. We seem to be shifting our priorities away from the old concept of academic freedom to a new concept that includes a concern for social and political crises. That has its advantages and its dangers. I see us somewhat moving toward the South American or Oriental model of a university, in which the university is a major

force in the political and intellectual life in the community and provides intellectual leadership for revolution. I think we're going to see this trend increasing. It looks as though we may be over the hump as far as the demonstrations in the street are concerned, but we are apparently not over the hump yet with the "crazies" blowing up the buildings. The emphasis seems to have shifted from large scale student demonstrations to small scale guerrilla fighting. College reading programs may be increasingly subject to demands for more "relevant" materials, especially since the minority groups being recruited often have the greatest need for basic skills.

A related trend has to do with the tremendous democratization of higher education. We have finally come to the point of view that higher education is good for people, and we're even beginning to think that if it's good for people, we ought not to deprive them of it. So we are increasingly getting all segments of our society into higher education. As a result of that, we're getting tremendous increase in what you and I call remedial cases. About seventy per cent of the students entering junior colleges are getting some kind of remedial help in basic skills, and that certainly was not the case in four year colleges twenty years ago. We are running into more and more students who simply cannot read their textbooks.

SOME SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Let's speculate about what's going to happen in the future to reading programs. I think this advance of technology is going to continue. It never has stopped before. In spite of the resistance to it on economic, political and philosophical grounds, we are not going to stop the increase in technological growth in our society. Our programs will have to respond accordingly. We are also going to have to fit into a curriculum that will increasingly match the nature of the external political and economic realities. That's going to be demanded of us. I think higher education is going to become more highly individualized, and we're going to need a great deal more flexibility than we have had in the past. As I said earlier, I think the liberal position is going to weaken. I find that unfortunate, but I think it will weaken. In spite of our need for a liberal education position in dealing with social and moral problems, the curriculum is probably going to become more rigid in some ways, in spite of its being more individualized.

I think colleges and universities may not survive as we know them. Many students, maybe the majority of them, feel that colleges and universities as they are now constituted are a real anachronism. The public feels that they're the cause and hotbed of revolt. We hear rumors of administrative committees in major American universities considering putting barbed wire around the campus. Though no one has made that decision yet, we may yet be conducting our programs in the midst of armed camps.

Raygor

Another prediction I would make is the locus for responsibility for learning is going to continue to move toward the teacher and the institution rather than being loaded on the student. Remember the old excuses; "well he really wasn't ready for college," or "he's really a pretty dumb kid," or "he's really a dyslexic." These aren't going to work anymore. We simply can no longer take the position that we're not responsible if the student doesn't master what we try to teach him. We may even have to show that we're really useful and effective in college reading programs.

To conclude:

If we continue to make the same rate of progress in educational technology —

If we can find ways to work new types of business and educational organizations into higher education —

If we can develop fail-safe instructional systems—

If we can adapt staff and students to the needs of the new technology—

If we can find ways of financing the incredible costs of effective learning systems—

If we can do all this without losing the essential humanity that first stimulated the creation of higher education—

If we can take advantage of all we have learned in the past about reading instruction and not try to rediscover the universe—

If we can really get the politicians to put our money where their talk has been—

If we can get the Right to Read Effort to show new ways to solve national educational problems without becoming a huge political and economic boondoggle—

Then we can expect to see miracles.

I have great optimism, for the first time in years.

If you had asked me a year ago—will anything really happen in the next twenty years to make a real difference in how well children and adults learn to read, I would have said "No."

Now I believe we have a good chance of seeing things most of us would not have believed possible.

Let's hope that before life begins at forty for the National Reading Conference, that, like Jules Verne, we have the age-old experience of having our most optimistic predictions become underestimates.