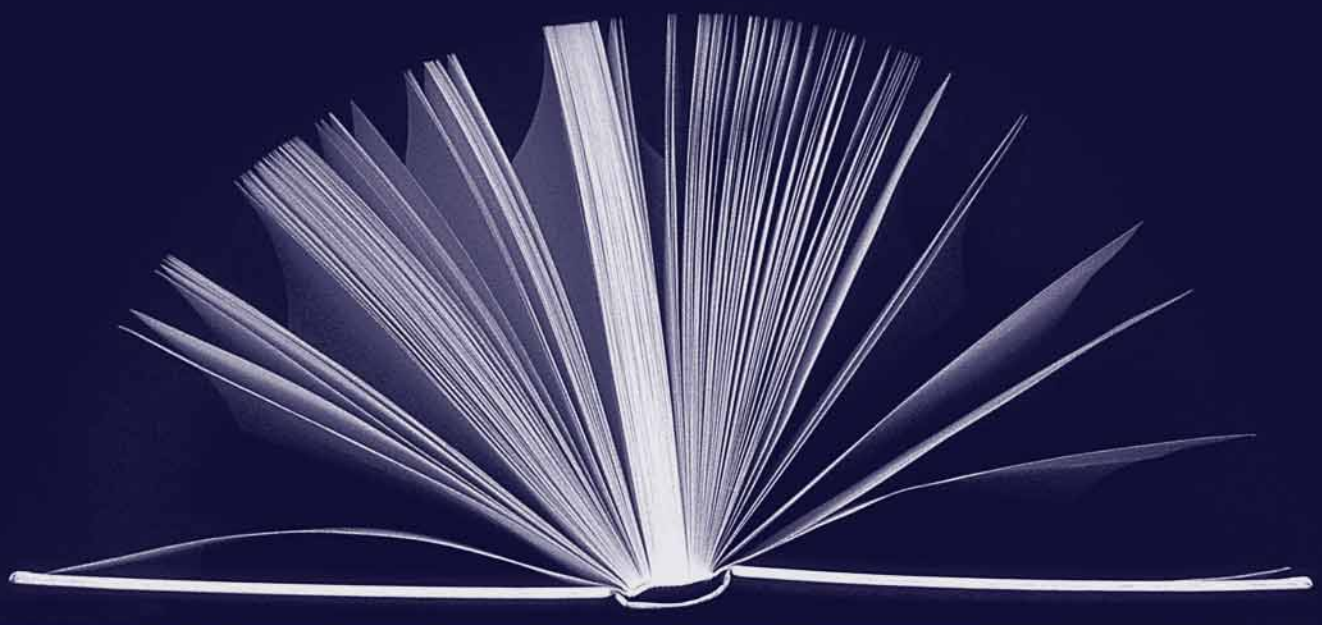
SHARING SUCCESS

LEADING CHANGE IN LITERACY

SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT STORIES

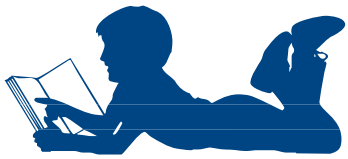


SERVE

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

lĭt′ər-ə-sē

n. The condition or quality of being literate, esp. the ability to read and write



LEADING CHANGE IN LITERACY

SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT STORIES

Written for SERVE
by

C. Steven Bingham, Ed.D.
Literacy Project Director
SERVE

Elizabeth Anne Neal, M.Ed.
Director of Federal Programs
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County (NC) Schools

Linda Tesh, M.Ed.
Director of Federal Programs
Surry County (NC) Schools

Patsy Turner, Ed.S.
Instructional Specialist
Surry County (NC) Schools

Cherise Millsaps, M.Ed.
Literacy Specialist
Surry County (NC) School

SERVE Publication, 1998

The SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
Associated with the School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

1998
First Printing

Edited by

Charles Ahearn, Director of Publishing and Quality Assurance

Christy Casbon, Communications Specialist

Donna Nalley, Senior Program Specialist

Designed by

Tracy A. Hamilton, Design Specialist

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

This document was produced with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RJ96006701.

Contents

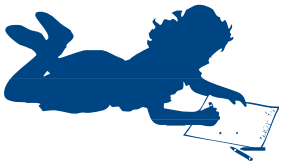


Table of Contents

About SERVE
i

Special Thanks
iii

Purpose of Document
1

The New Three R's in Reading & Writing:
Research, Redesign, & Rubrics—A Reading Literacy Case Report
2

The Surry County *Developing Efficient Readers* Project
8

Looking at the Districts' Approaches: Recommendations for Leaders
16

R&D Program Manager's Note
18

End Notes
19

References
20

Appendix
21

About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is an educational organization whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To address the mission, SERVE engages in research and development in educational issues of critical importance to educators in the region and in the provision of research-based services to SEAs and LEAs which are striving for comprehensive school improvement. Committed to a shared vision of the future of education in the region, the organization is governed by a board of directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and representatives of teachers and the private sector.

SERVE's core component is a Regional Educational Laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. SERVE has additional major funding from the Department in the areas of Migrant Education and School Leadership and is the lead agency in the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium for the Southeast and the Southeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SEIR◆TEC). Based on these grants and contracts, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding to local, regional, and national needs. These program areas are

- Program on Assessment, Accountability, and Standards
- Program for Children, Families, and Communities
- Program on Education Policy
- Program for the Improvement of Science and Mathematics Education
- Program on School Development and Reform
- Program on Technology in Learning

SERVE's National Specialty Area is Early Childhood Education, and the staff of SERVE's Program for Children, Families, and Communities is developing the expertise and the ability to provide leadership and support to the early childhood community nationwide for children from birth to eight years old.

In addition to the program areas, the SERVE Evaluation Department supports the evaluation activities of the major grants and contracts and provides evaluation services to SEAs and LEAs in the region. Through its Publishing and Quality Assurance Department, SERVE publishes a variety of studies, training materials, policy briefs, and other products of the programs. These informative and low-cost publications include guides to available resources, summaries of current issues in education policy, and examples of exemplary educational programs. Through its programmatic, evaluation, and publishing activities, SERVE also provides contracted staff development and technical assistance in many areas of expertise to assist education agencies in achieving their school improvement goals.

The SERVE head office is at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with major staff groups located in Tallahassee, FL, and Atlanta, GA, and policy advisors in each state department of education in the region. Current and detailed information on any of the program and service areas noted here may be found on SERVE's site on the World Wide Web at www.serve.org.

Contact SERVE

SERVE–Alabama

Education Policy Analyst

Office forthcoming—please call the SERVE main office for assistance at 800-755-3277

SERVE–Florida

Database Information Services Center

1203 Governor's Square Blvd.
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6012
800-352-3747
Fax 850-671-6020

School Development and Reform

SERVEing Young Children

Publishing and Quality Assurance

1203 Governor's Square Blvd.
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6000
800-352-6001
Fax 850-671-6020

Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at SERVE

1203 Governor's Square Blvd.
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6033
800-854-0476
Fax 850-671-6010

Education Policy Analyst

Office of the Commissioner
The Capitol, LL 24
Tallahassee, FL 32399
850-488-9513
Fax 850-488-1492

SERVE–Georgia

Urban Education and Teacher Leadership

41 Marietta Street, NW
Suite 1110
Atlanta, GA 30303
800-755-3277
Fax 404-577-7812

Education Policy Analyst

Georgia Department of Education
2066 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334
404-657-0148
Fax 404-651-4673

SERVE-Mississippi

Education Policy Analyst

State Department of Education
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39201
601-359-3501
Fax 601-359-3667
wmoore@serve.org

SERVE–North Carolina (MAIN OFFICE)

Assessment, Standards, and Accountability

Education Policy

Evaluation

Executive Services

Operations

P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
336-334-3211
800-755-3277
Fax 336-334-3268

Anchor School Project

Children, Families, and Communities

Region IV Comprehensive Center

SERVE Leaders Institute

Southeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium

P.O. Box 5406
Greensboro, NC 27435
336-334-3211
800-545-7075
Fax 336-334-4671

Education Policy Analyst

Department of Public Instruction
Education Building
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
919-715-1245
Fax 919-715-1278

SERVE–South Carolina

Education Policy Analyst

Office forthcoming—please call the SERVE main office for assistance at 800-755-3277

Dr. John R. Sanders
Executive Director, SERVE

Website: http://www.serve.org
E-mail: info@serve.org

Special Thanks . . .

to the teachers and administrators of the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank and Surry County Schools whose untiring efforts to improve children's reading and writing have culminated in this publication. We appreciate your willingness to share your stories with educators across the Southeast and beyond.

We also thank the following individuals for reviewing and critiquing this document:

Sandy Bostelman, Curriculum Director, Ben Hill County Schools, GA

Paula Egelson, Senior Research Specialist, SERVE, Greensboro, NC

Gylde Fitzpatrick, Assistant Superintendent, Poplarville School District, MS

Becky Greer, Principal, Loflin Elementary School, Asheboro City Schools, NC

Wendy McColskey, Director of Accountability & Assessment, SERVE, Greensboro, NC

Nancy McMunn, Research Specialist, SERVE, Greensboro, NC

Vicky Mikow-Porto, Senior Policy Analyst, SERVE, Greensboro, NC

Joe Peel, Superintendent, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Schools, NC

Patricia Schenck, Resource Teacher, Bay District Schools, FL

Purpose of the Document

Responsive educators concur that the demands of living in a technological, information-based society call for improving student literacy outcomes in schools. For most schools, improving student reading and writing requires leading change and abandoning business as usual. District leaders in two North Carolina local education agencies have responded effectively to leading change for improved student literacy in differing ways. *Leading Change in Literacy* provides a forum for leaders in these two districts to share their stories—stories that exemplify the critical role the central office can play in facilitating reading improvement districtwide.

A fundamental realization undergirding our district stories is that, with school restructuring, the roles and responsibilities of central office personnel are changing. Even as the decade began, education researchers and practitioners were discovering the importance of district leaders supporting—as contrasted with historically regulating—the growth of their teachers and administrators.[1]

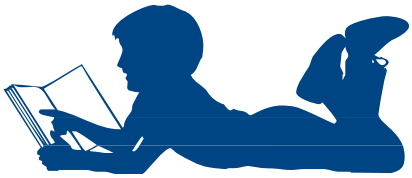
Echoing the new role for the central office, noted school reformist Phil Schlechty, argued that district leadership is all about developing schools' capacity for change and improvement—not about making decisions but rather causing decisions to be made.[2] K.J. Tewel, acknowledging the need for support and training for personnel in restructured districts, lamented that the change in our understanding of central office is so sweeping that staff with such titles as *assistant superintendent, program director,* or *supervisor* are reinventing their functions as they go.[3] How, then, did the district administrators whose initiatives appear in this report go about leading change in literacy?

Following numerous site visits to schools in each district, conversations with administrators, principals, teachers, students, and community partners, SERVE researchers asked the writers of this document to address a number of questions:

- What need or problem caused you to want to improve your program?
- How did you begin?
- What does your reading program look like?
- What results have you attained?
- How have you refined your initial efforts and scaled up the program?
- What conclusions and recommendations do you have for other districts leading change in reading?

Each writer has addressed these questions and others with candor and humility, realizing that improving literacy is a work-in-progress.[4]

Leading Change in Literacy consists of three parts: First, Elizabeth Anne Neal describes how administrators, principals, and teachers in the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County school district went about changing its reading program. (Ms. Neal is Director of Federal Programs and a principal designer of the district's program.) Next, Linda Tesh, Patsy Turner, and Cherise Millsaps, central office personnel in the Surry County district, depict Surry County's experience with the *Developing Efficient Readers* program. Finally, to guide educators considering districtwide reading literacy improvement, *Leading Change in Literacy* presents the commonalities and differences of each approach and makes recommendations for district leaders.



The New Three R's in Reading & Writing: Research, Redesign, & Rubrics— A Reading Literacy Case Report

Elizabeth Anne Neal, M.Ed.
Director of Federal Programs
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools

Do you have students who do not know how to read and write and teachers who do not know how to "fix" them? This article examines how one North Carolina school system addressed this common problem and improved student achievement in the area of communication skills for grades 1-6. The educators studied relevant, applied research and then redesigned their communication skills program to reflect the research while involving schools in staff development that centered on the redesigned components.

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank school system has now institutionalized the program with the use of a document that includes an instructional practice and rubrics (teacher self-assessment weekly checklist for effective communication skills instruction). The document provides a framework for schools and teachers to use as they reflect and self-assess their implementation of the components in this research-based communication skills program.

Who Are We?

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank School District is a small, rural, northeastern North Carolina community with 11 schools (7 elementary, 2 middle, 1 alternative, and 1 high school) and 6,200 students. In 1992 the new school superintendent and assistant superintendent began to create a school organization that was concerned with continuous learning—focused not just on knowledge but on the *application* of knowledge. This administration team had goals that involved making changes in teaching, assessment, and leadership in this low-wealth district where achievement levels on the state's multiple-choice tests were below state average and not improving. Significantly, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank is the 25th poorest of the state's 119 districts with over 62 percent of its K-6 students receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

We had falsely assumed that elementary teachers were experts at teaching children how to read and write. We recognized the need to tailor our training efforts into adequately preparing all elementary teachers to utilize the latest research and instructional methods to successfully teach all children in a diverse population.

Why Did We Need to Change?

Catalysts for change in our elementary schools' communication skills curriculum and instructional practices existed on several fronts. First, the district administrators' leadership, vision, and goals inspired us to act. Second, our investigation into why large numbers of our students read below grade-level revealed that most of our K-5 teachers had taken only one college course in teaching reading. We had falsely assumed that elementary teachers were experts at teaching children how to read and write. We recognized the need to tailor our training efforts into adequately preparing

all elementary teachers to utilize the latest research and instructional methods to successfully teach all children in a diverse population. We also discovered that the instructional leaders at many of our elementary schools (principal, assistant principal, and instructional specialist) had limited knowledge and skill at teaching reading and writing, especially to the at-risk student populations.

As we began to analyze our needs under the direction of our superintendent and assistant superintendent for instruction, we were presented with the opportunity to pilot a new state accountability plan. The latest comprehensive program to reorganize North Carolina public schools, the ABC Plan, completed its first full year of statewide implementation in 1996-1997. The ABC Plan focuses on school site accountability, the academic basic curriculum, and local control. Under the plan, individual schools and their teachers are held accountable for student achievement as measured by the growth and performance of student cohorts as they move from grade to grade.

Each elementary school in North Carolina is given annual performance standards and growth goals based on its student population. The state then uses end-of-grade tests in reading, writing, and math (grades 3-8) to evaluate the growth that has occurred at each school. Under the ABC model, a school's annual performance would fall into one of four categories: "Exemplary Growth," "Met Expected Growth," "Expected Growth Not Met," and "Low-Performing."

Our leadership viewed the new ABC Plan as an opportunity to base accountability on making progress with all students wherever they started, rather than on comparisons between well-funded and poor districts. Our administrators realized, however, that the decision to participate in the ABC pilot would increase pressure on each of our elementary schools to develop and implement plans that focused on the best instructional strategies for improving reading, writing, and math for all students at all grade levels. Armed with that realization, district administrators guided our elementary schools' instructional leaders and their staffs through the process of systemic reading and writing improvement.

What Did We Do?

In August, prior to the beginning of the 1995-1996 ABC pilot school year, our superintendent, Dr. Joseph Peel, led our district and school-level administrators in a retreat in which he articulated the need for change, starting a dialogue that would build capacity within the group to promote change. He explained the need for curriculum alignment with all teachers and administrators while promoting a clear vision and high expectations for all children.

Superintendent Peel then discussed the need for a district-level "game plan" which would enable us to reach and teach all children. He recognized the fact that each elementary school embraced site-based management which provides school staffs the flexibility to make their own decisions. At the same time, he stressed that teachers can no longer afford to go into their classrooms, shut the door, and operate like individual contractors. Dr. Peel explained that the district was responsible for giving direction and focusing instruction that occurred at the school. The district would provide direction so that the schools had the capacity to make the changes necessary to impact the classroom. Also during this retreat, the schools, under the direction of our testing coordinator, began an analysis of individual school test data so that schools could identify and celebrate their

strengths while addressing their weaknesses with improvement strategies.

Furthermore, we began to develop a common understanding that the instructional decisions we made for our students should be based upon research, best practices, and data. This retreat lit a fire of enthusiasm and motivation in each of us. Dr. Peel proclaimed at the close of that August retreat, "We are ready to rock and roll"—and that we did! All left with a renewed sense of confidence and excitement.

We immediately began a district-level book study led by Dr. Peel. Each administrator read and discussed *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Dr. Peel encouraged principals to replicate the book study with teachers at their school; many did. Administrators were given several other books and were encouraged to read and share them with their faculties, including Cunningham and Allington's *Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write,* Cunningham's *Phonics They Use,* Allington and Cunningham's *Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write*, and Routman's *Literacy at the Crossroads.*

Dr. Peel proclaimed at the close of that August retreat, "We are ready to rock and roll"—and that we did!

The summer retreat was also the beginning of our association with an outside reading/writing consultant, Connie Prevatte. Ms. Prevatte spent a day with our school administrators explaining the latest research in learning theory and communication skills. While district and school personnel studied the books, Ms. Prevatte trained K-6 teachers to use the Innovative Sciences' *Thinking Maps*.[5] *Thinking Maps* provide a common visual language of eight specific graphic organizers that become a "toolbox," enabling student writers to actively organize information and efficiently share content knowledge. Each school decided to use Title I funds to implement *Thinking Map* to help all students become better readers and writers. With the purchase of these materials, each school participated in one initial day of training and three follow-up days based on their individual school needs.

Ms. Prevatte explained and modeled the infusion of *Thinking Maps* into lessons and discussed with each teacher the same information she had shared at the retreat on the latest communication skills research and clinical practices to improve reading and writing. She provided much-needed follow-up activities over a period of two years. These follow-up sessions provided examples of quality instruction through modeling lessons at each school. She gave constructive, non-threatening feedback to teachers and administrators on how to improve instruction.

As Ms. Prevatte worked with our schools and as we gained more knowledge about reading research, we realized that our communication skills instruction was fragmented, varying greatly from school to school and even classroom to classroom within the same school. The most obvious weakness in our communication skills instruction was the lack of real connection between reading and writing in many classrooms. We also began to question the soundness of using instructional practices such as round-robin reading, direct instruction in spelling and grammar isolated from students' writing, and the assignment of drill and skill worksheets which had little, if any, impact on student learning.

By the end of the school year, we had absorbed a wealth of information on how best to teach reading and writing and had begun to talk with teachers and instructional leaders at the school level about a communication skills framework based on Patricia Cunningham's Four-Blocks Literacy Model.[6] This model seemed to correlate most closely with the research-based strategies we had been studying throughout the school year. As the 1995-1996 school year came to a close, many of our principals, instructional specialists, and teachers began to question what all our research and discussions would look like if

If teachers have plenty of research to support change, they are more willing to make the changes.

it were written. In other words, they wanted a "game plan."

Over the summer of 1996, the consultant, Dr. Peel, and the Director of Federal Programs used the research and Pat Cunningham's work to develop a communication skills framework and belief statements about literacy and literacy instruction. The framework contains the following six components:

- Teacher Read Aloud
- Self-Selected Reading with Teacher/Student Conferences
- Teacher-Directed Reading
- Writing
- Word Skills
- Take-Home Reading

During the 1996 Summer Administrative Retreat, we presented the "Communication Skills Beliefs and Framework" to building-level administrators. We had also designed a a self-assessment rubric for teachers to use in critiquing their instructional practices. There appeared to be complete buy-in on the document at the conclusion of the retreat because we received absolutely no negative feedback. We had assumed that teachers and principals had embraced the research and would use the rubrics as a way in which to assess "where they were" in being able to implement the six components. We had envisioned teachers and principals using this feedback and designing staff development sessions with the consultant for the second year of study based on the feedback they received from using the rubrics. However, this was not what happened. Many teachers felt the framework was too rigid and that it did not take into account individual teacher styles. Plus, they perceived the rubrics as an "I gotcha!" summative evaluation instead of the way it was designed to be used.

In schools where the administrators had held book studies, intense summer staff development sessions, and open discussion of the reading and writing research, acceptance for the six components had greater endorsement. This finding led us to believe that if teachers have plenty of research to support change, they are more willing to make the changes.

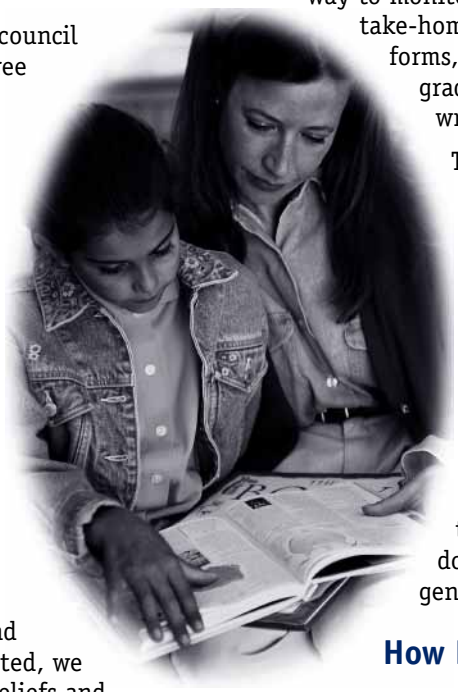
When we encountered this stumbling block, Dr. Peel spent many days in schools listening intently to teachers' concerns, many of which were valid and needed to be addressed. Therefore, Dr. Peel decided to form a Communication Skills Leadership Council. This council consisted of about 28 people with K-6 representatives from every elementary school in the district. Their task was to examine the "Communication Skills Beliefs and Framework" and recreate a document that could be supported and implemented in every grade 1-6 classroom.

Dr. Peel served as the leader of this group which reviewed the research and generated eight topics from the beliefs and framework that they felt were controversial or that teachers had a hard time understanding and/or accepting.

These topics included such questions as:

- How should we teach spelling and grammar?
- What does research say about the best way to teach handwriting and phonics?
- What is the purpose of oral reading?

To address each topic, the council formed study groups of three or four people with each group assuming responsibility for becoming an expert in one of the eight areas. We provided each group with a wealth of research material on their topic from which they could pull information. After completing a month-long study of research, each group reported its findings and made recommendations to the Council.



Once our research study and reporting had been completed, we once again looked at the beliefs and framework. We wanted the final document to be helpful in giving guidance and direction to the new teacher as well as to offer flexibility to the experienced and successful teacher.

By the end of the 1996-1997 school year, the Council had revised the beliefs and framework creating a document everyone believed in and could support. Ironically, most of the topics the Council had questioned initially were supported in the final analysis. We realized that in order to promote change, we must support teachers individually in their reading of research and in their evaluation of best practices.

We realized that in order to promote change, we must support teachers individually in their reading of research and in their evaluation of best practices.

The Council saw a need to append the document with a wealth of information. Various members of the Council agreed to devote part of their summer to compiling additional information. Some of the appendices included a suggested list of graded read-alouds, methods for conducting reading conferences, a checklist to use as a way to monitor skills taught, samples of take-home reading management forms, essential skills for each grade, and rubrics for assessing writing across the curriculum.

The final document, including the beliefs, the framework for the six components of a balanced program, and the appendices, was introduced at the 1997 Summer Retreat. Retreat participants, then, introduced the revised document to their school staffs in August 1997. This time, the acceptance of the document was total and genuine.

How Did We Do?

For the past two years, state test results have been positive. During the pilot year for the ABC Plan (1995-1996), every elementary school in our district reached the 110-percent exemplary growth standard. These results indicated that students learned in every elementary school, regardless of its demographic composition. When these scores were disaggregated, we found that all subsets of students (gifted, minorities, females, low-performing, etc.) showed growth.

During the 1996-1997 school year, 75 percent of our elementary schools reached at least the expected growth standards, with four elementary schools maintaining the exemplary growth standard that they

had reached during the previous pilot year. These test results over the past two years have been achieved without excluding more students from testing. The state assessment program provides for exclusion of up to five percent of exceptional children from testing. We tested over 98 percent of all students in grades 3-8, the highest percentage ever tested in our district.

We are very encouraged by the last two years of test results. Our district administrators, principals, and teachers believe that the quality of what is happening in our classrooms between teacher and student is improving.

What Have We Learned?

The dictionary defines *change* as "to make different; alter; modify." What this simplistic statement fails to address, however, is the timeline for change because effective change requires time. As well, this definition does not relate the need to involve the people in the process who are expected to implement the change. The definition also leaves out that change is often a traumatic, difficult, and sometimes frustrating process.

We learned that teachers need to refine their beliefs about good instructional practices through reading the research and evaluating what works and does not work with their students. We discovered that research provides guidance but must be used with investigations of how practices work with students in a particular classroom.

Through this process, we produced the document *A Connected Approach to Communications Skills*. As a result of its two-year development, the final result is a much more useful and valuable guide for teachers than it was originally. We knew two years ago that it was time for a change in our reading instruction, and we based the mission for our journey on a quote from *Becoming a Nation of Readers:*

> *The knowledge is now available to make worthwhile improvements in reading throughout the United States. If the practices seen in classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools could be introduced everywhere, improvements in reading would be dramatic.*

Through this initiative we realized that teachers, as professionals, need to read about, discuss, and internalize what research says are the best practices so that they can practice their craft supported by a professional community using an instructional framework.

The Surry County *Developing Efficient Readers* Project

Linda Tesh, M.Ed.
Federal Programs Director

Patsy Turner, Ed.S.
Instructional Specialist

Cherise Millsaps, M.Ed.
Literacy Specialist

What is Reading?

In the early 1990's, many business leaders were distraught over the growing number of high school graduates who could not read well enough to apply information to solve on-the-job problems. Many of those same graduates, however, had scored well on standardized reading tests and were experts at reciting information in its original context. What had happened (or not happened) in their reading instruction?

Searching for answers, educational reformers asked children, "What is reading?" Some defined reading as "saying the hard words correctly." For others, it was "doing worksheets." One child said it was "reading the same story over and over until everyone had a turn." Only the most proficient students defined reading in pleasurable terms related to gaining useful or interesting information from the print. A few students suggested personally motivated reasons that connected reading to problem-solving. For most, reading was something some people did for fun at home.

Educational reformers asked children, "What is reading?" Only the most proficient students defined reading in pleasurable terms related to gaining useful or interesting information from the print.

In reality, children spent very little time "reading" at school. Typical language arts activities consisted of completing skill sheets, reciting lists of unrelated words, and copying information from the blackboard. Independent reading occurred at free time on library days. Those who truly loved to read did so on their own.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction responded to this dilemma by adopting a new language arts curriculum in 1992 that emphasized the need to create daily opportunities for children to read, write, and think at school. The curriculum offered several definitions of reading that encompassed a common theme summarized as follows:

> *Reading is the dynamic interaction of cue systems representing the reader's existing knowledge* (semantic), *the structure of the language* (syntactic), *and the sounds of the words* (grapho-phonic) *with the core of this dynamic interaction being meaning.*

A new definition of reading, however, did not automatically produce a change in instructional practices. Many teachers were frustrated because their students were not interested in reading, and they found themselves searching for new approaches and instructional alternatives for those children who could not or would not read.

The Surry County literacy initiative began in response to those teachers who expressed a desire to better understand how

to teach children to read and write using a state curriculum that focused on a holistic theory of literacy development. Even though the professional literature advocated the successes of meaning-based instruction, most veteran teachers had little, if any, training in how to implement these strategies in their classrooms.

School systems that had adopted the holistic philosophy without providing adequate staff development for teachers were plagued with vast differences in instructional approaches and student results. Some teachers thought *whole language* meant reading the whole book to the whole class. Most had a vague understanding of how to teach reading, writing, grammar, and spelling skills in a holistic classroom. The lack of background experience and training caused instructional gaps because teachers tried to implement a new philosophy without understanding the integration of the cue systems involved in literacy development.

A closer review of teacher preparation revealed that most colleges and universities required only one survey course in reading that did not provide intensive training in teaching reading and writing. Consequently, teachers relied heavily upon the manual from the basal text and other commercially produced kits to guide them in preparing lessons for the entire class. At this time, teachers lacked the professional knowledge needed to individualize instruction for specific students. This lack of specific preparation for teachers along with their professional desire to meet the needs of children bolstered the search for appropriate staff development that would improve the quality of teaching and create learning environments supportive of successful reading and writing processes.

Some teachers thought *whole language* meant reading the whole book to the whole class.

Through an extensive search for literacy experts who could provide staff development for teachers, Surry County administrators selected Dr. Christopher Baker, Professor of Education at Salem College. A native Australian, Dr. Baker exhibited a unique passion for literacy. His challenging nature and elevated expectations enabled him to inspire teachers in critical thinking and analysis uncommon in traditional workshops. Most reported it was one of the most professionally stimulating experiences of their careers. Although we were unaware of where our early efforts with Dr. Baker would lead, staff development may now be said to have occurred in two phases.

Phase One

Funds were limited during the early days of training. Teachers volunteered to attend Saturday classes with only the promise of pizza for lunch as personal enticement. Because of their hunger for professional growth, most returned for the next series of classes. When funds were available, the administration paid small stipends. Dr. Baker also contributed time and effort beyond his consultant's fee by providing on-site demonstrations using various techniques with both individuals and groups of students.

But even with keen interest and expert demonstrations, several pieces were missing. For example, since funds were not routinely available for substitutes and stipends, classes were scheduled on Saturdays throughout the school year. Teachers attended when they could, but several were not able to attend every

session. Unfortunately, missed sessions constituted "holes" in understanding.

A second problem involved the scope and sequence of the training. Through the training process, teachers examined multiple literacy components, including reading and learning theory, the writing process, assessment procedures, and miscue analysis—a procedure that enables teachers to diagnostically analyze reader strategies to make appropriate instructional plans and teaching strategies for literacy development. For teachers to experience the entire training package, they had to commit to several Saturdays. Many were unable to complete the entire training during a single school year.

Another problem centered around the funding issue. Money was not available to purchase the necessary professional literature and texts for training, so comparing and discussing literacy concepts from the research was not possible. As a result, when new concepts were presented, teachers' questions and comments referred only to "Dr. Baker's philosophy."

This professional development model continued for about five years with highly motivated teachers attending the classes. During the last three years of this phase, staff development funds from Title I and special education were provided to defray consultant expenses and provide small stipends for teachers.

Despite the shortcomings, teachers who completed the series of classes showed a depth of understanding of the literacy process not exhibited schoolwide. Their standardized test scores revealed even the most disadvantaged students performing at or above grade-level. In addition, in schools where Title I and/or special education teachers worked collaboratively with regular education teachers to maintain consistency in instructional techniques for all children, at-risk children out-performed their peers in neighboring classrooms where collaboration did not exist.

These "pockets of success" spurred the decision to refine the model for training and seek grant monies for funding. The new model also attempted to correct earlier inconsistencies in training as well as add a lab school where teachers practiced new strategies in a supportive setting. The original project, *Developing Efficient Readers*, began with the goal of all children reading for meaning by the end of second grade. With the success of inclusive strategies for at-risk children, the project's motto became: "All teachers are responsible for the education of all children."

Phase Two

In Phase Two, although the training components remained the same, numerous improvements were made to the process. Funding was generated from a number of grants, including the Department of Public Instruction and Goals 2000. Now teachers applied to participate and committed to a year-long staff development program that included 50 hours of graduate-level training in literacy processes and assessment followed by a 50-hour supervised practicum in a summer lab school. Successful graduates of the 100-hour training program received an endorsement in reading added to their teaching license and $500 to use for books to expand their classroom libraries.

The lab school was directed by Dr. Baker who maintained high and demanding expectations for all participants. He also supervised the lab practicum and modeled effective instructional techniques with children. The curriculum was enhanced by expanding the components of the original model and by employing a rigid syllabus of instruction utilizing current reading and writing research. Significantly, the instruction included practices designed for individuals as well as small or large groups of students.

Textbooks and notebooks of current professional articles which were distributed to teachers served as reference materials and helped foster richer discussions and deepened understanding. Texts employed included Brian Cambourne's *The Whole Story*; Linda Crafton's *Getting Started, Moving Forward*; Yetta and Ken Goodman's *Reading Miscue Inventory;* Donald Grave's *A Fresh Look at Writing*; and Frank Smith's *Reading Without Nonsense*.

Because of the year-long training calendar, teachers were allowed time to practice skills and clarify their understanding of new information. Teachers completed assignments for each class session and discussed these as a group. Training was aimed at first- and second-grade teachers, as well as Title I and special education teachers. Teachers in other grades participated on a space-available basis. Over time, collaborative efforts evolved with teachers forming instructional teams to work with at-risk children.

The addition of a summer lab school enabled teachers to practice strategies learned in a supervised and supportive setting.

Each teacher selected two students to share the experience. Parents, too, were involved in the lab school. They attended awareness sessions and received ideas to use at home. Parents responded positively to their child's participation in the lab with many requesting permission for their child's future enrollment.

The Lab School Model

The key differences between the lab school model and traditional staff development involved the lab activities and ongoing mentor support. The lab school was designed as a supervised practicum concluding the formal training process, and it enabled teachers to practice instructional strategies in a supportive environment before implementing them in their classrooms. The lab schedule served as a model for a language arts block within a typical school day. Teachers informed the parents of two selected students that the intent of the lab was to enhance teachers' professional development. Even in the short seven-to-eight-day program, however, positive changes in students' attitudes were clearly evident. As a result, parents began requesting that their children be allowed to participate.

Organizing the lab became a team effort. Teachers selected a theme and worked collaboratively to create a warm, inviting, low-risk environment supportive of literacy learning. They masterfully converted a carpeted multi-purpose elementary schoolroom into a maze of books, computers, animals, and theme-related paraphernalia. Personal space was defined by using blankets, quilts, pillows, and a plethora of books. In addition, lab materials were

loaned or donated by a variety of sources including educational products distributors, book companies, software distributors, and local businesses. Used materials purchased with grant funds were later distributed to schools for continued use by trained teachers.

The Lab School Schedule

The lab schedule modeled a balanced reading program and included opportunities for teachers to work with children individually and in groups. Each sequential learning activity may be summarized as follows:

- **Whole Group Focus.** The day began with a whole group focus around a musical theme. Teachers and students danced and sang together. Children quickly remembered the words to songs posted on charts, and, as a writing activity, many added verses.
- **Reading Aloud to Children.** Each teacher read appropriate material to provide a specific focus for his/her students. Many chose books that provided background information and vocabulary that students would use later in the day.
- **Mini-lessons.** Teachers chose their most appropriate time for direct instruction. They used samples from the child's writing to develop lessons on spelling or grammar, and used shared or guided reading activities to focus on specific reading strategies.
- **Individual Reading Conferences.** Teachers scheduled a time to read individually with each child every day. These segments allowed for practice and monitoring of reading strategy instruction and assessment of student progress. Teachers used an individual reading conference form to document student progress.
- **Sustained Silent Reading (SSR).** Each day the entire lab community—children and adults—stopped for a fifteen-minute period of uninterrupted personal reading. Children genuinely cherished this time, and good-natured protests were heard when the time ended.
- **Reflection and Sharing.** Before the children were dismissed, they participated in a time of reflection and sharing. Some shared an exciting part of a story they had read or a surprising observation in the "critter center." Their shared experiences provided rich material for personal journals or stories.
- **Extension Activities.** Centers throughout the lab facilitated the integration of language arts and the content areas by providing authentic reasons for reading and writing. An array of opportunities were available for students to express their understanding of ideas and expand on new concepts learned.

The Extension Areas included the following:

- **A Writing Center.** This center was filled with an assortment of note paper, stationery, and colorful pens and pencils to encourage children to communicate their ideas with each other or to publish their work for display.
- **A Critter Center.** This center was inhabited by a variety of "caged" animals ranging from quiet box turtles to energetic hamsters with a few well-supervised snakes. A journal was available for each visitor to record his/her observations.
- **A Computer Center.** This space contained a wide selection of literacy software. Children composed their own stories, rewrote others from computer text, and read with interactive software. The *Wiggle Works* program enabled children to read and record themselves on the computer. Children arrived early and stayed late for extra time with the technology. Parents were also impressed when children explained and demonstrated the use of various programs.
- **A Drama Center.** This center was used for plays and puppet shows. Children demonstrated literacy acquisition through role-playing and dramatic production.
- **A Mail System.** The system provided for all children and adults to have mailboxes. As a powerful motivator for writing, children often used the Writing Center to compose a special message that later appeared in a mailbox. Teachers wrote to children each day as well as to each other.

In addition to these inviting and thought-provoking features for children, there were specific responsibilities and expectations for teachers. One of those was a videotaped individual reading conference with one of their students. Teachers viewed the tape and completed a self-assessment form, then shared the tape and their perceptions with an assigned supportive mentor. Although self-assessment was not always easy, teachers appreciated the benefits of critically analyzing their behavior and techniques with children.

Supporting Components

The other key component of the *Developing Efficient Readers* staff development model that differs from most was providing **mentor support** for teachers during the lab school. The mentoring aspect grew in depth out of a need expressed by teachers for modeling and support. Mentors were selected based on successful completion of the training and demonstrated expertise in implementing instructional strategies in the classroom. They received additional training in listening skills, questioning techniques, and facilitating group discussions. During the lab, they met daily with the literacy trainer to discuss specific concerns and/or to receive other suggestions on how to assist a specific teacher more effectively.

Each mentor worked with five-to-six teachers. Specific duties included leading discussions on best practices, conferencing with individual teachers about techniques, modeling effective strategies as needed, and assisting with the videotaped reading conference. Because mentors were selected from several schools across the district, they began to provide continuous, informal support systems for teachers at the school level. As more teachers became trained, these networks of teachers and mentors supported each other.

Some teachers expressed a desire for continued professional growth to remain cognizant of implementation ideas and current research. They wanted to meet regularly to discuss hot topics and share ideas. Consequently, a **literacy support group** was formed and continues to meet monthly. Teachers discuss issues from professional literature as well as share successes and frustrations they experience in the classroom related to literacy.

The elements of the project grew above and beyond any one person's regular job responsibilities. In order for a staff development project this specialized to succeed, someone knowledgeable needed to have oversight. Using Goals 2000 grant monies, a part-time **literacy specialist** was employed to

- Arrange and organize continued training
- Coordinate all the elements of the lab school
- Facilitate mentor selection and training
- Provide ongoing support for teachers
- Lead support group meetings
- Represent the project at professional conferences
- Make presentations
- Assist with an outside formal evaluation of the project

Recognition and Evaluation

As a staff development model, the *Developing Efficient Readers* project has received state and national attention. Most recently, it was selected by the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) as an "exemplary district-designed reading initiative" to be featured in an upcoming videomagazine entitled "Leading Change in Reading." In addition, presentations have been made at several state, regional, and local conferences and meetings including

- International Reading Association's Annual Conference in New Orleans, April 1996
- Division of Compensatory Education, U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., May 1997
- SERVE Regional Forum on School Improvement in Atlanta, October 1997

As with any initiative, the ultimate questions are: *Is it working?* and *How do you know it's working?* Evidence of improvements in both instructional practices and student outcomes were assessed, yet a key indicator of the project's impact on teachers came from an unanticipated source. In the fall of 1996, the Surry County Schools requested a curriculum audit of all instructional programs. This outside evaluation repeatedly cited the *Developing Efficient Readers* Project as a model of positive staff development that empowers teachers and a vehicle for collaboration among regular education, Title I, and special education teachers.

Regarding student achievement, various indicators noted the exceptional impact this project had on children. Using North Carolina's End-of-Grade test scores, children in classrooms of trained teachers achieved above-average proficiency in reading, writing, and math. More specifically, in accordance with the North Carolina ABC Plan, the 1996-1997 test results showed that all nine of Surry County's elementary schools met their expected growth standard, with six excelling

to the exemplary standard and one recognized as a "School of Distinction." Furthermore, this elementary school maintains a high percentage of trained teachers.

The inclusion of thinking as a part of the reading process had dramatic results. Children routinely explained the reading strategies they used to help them read for meaning. Teachers shared success after success as reluctant readers gained confidence and became effective readers and writers. Parents' surveys and comments consistently reflected observations of positive changes in their children's attitudes as well as heightened interest in reading and writing. Most importantly, students' self-assessments consistently reflected their positive attitude about reading and writing.

To complete the process of assessing the effectiveness of the project, an outside evaluator was contracted. This evaluation focused on three areas: (1) the degree of effectiveness of the staff development; (2) the degree of implementation of the strategies; and (3) the achievement results of students in classrooms of trained teachers for two consecutive years as compared to the achievement of students of untrained teachers. Initial results are expected by spring 1998.

Currently, 78 percent of teachers in grades K-2 and 21 percent in grades 3-5 have completed training. Comparable training is in the planning stages for upper elementary and middle school teachers. A similar training format has been designed with an appropriate syllabus for instruction, training conducted by a consultant in collaboration with mentor trainers from our system, and opportunities for teachers to practice new skills and strategies with mentor support. Efforts are also underway to transfer literacy training responsibilities for new, incoming teachers in grades K-2 to trained mentor teachers. To facilitate more site-based support, multiple lab school sites throughout the district will be developed, and mentors will be selected from those sites. These site-based mentors will work with teachers in training during the summer lab school and will then continue to provide mentoring and support throughout the school year following the training.

What We Learned

Through the process of creating and implementing a model for staff development which matched the needs of the system, we learned some notable lessons which have significantly affected current project planning. In considering the need to sustain the positive effects of the project, we learned that a plan for continuing the staff development beyond the years of the grant funding period needed to be developed. Grant funding was a critical aspect of designing the model for staff development; however, training new personnel and offering support for trained teachers in implementing new classroom strategies has to become locally funded.

In addition, through discussions with teachers in the years following their training, we learned that a strong need existed for follow-up support in classrooms of trained teachers similar to the support received during the lab school training. Because a model for classroom support beyond lab school was not initially developed, teachers achieved varying degrees of success implementing new instructional strategies in their classrooms. Despite the formation of a districtwide literacy support group after the second year of the project, the need for site-based support for classroom instruction still existed.

More significantly, we learned that any effective model for staff development must be designed to meet the specific needs of the district. Administrators must listen to teachers to succeed in implementing change in the same way that teachers must listen to students to achieve the same goal. We must all learn from each other as we move through the process of change. Surry County is still listening, learning, and growing as we strive to obtain the goals of literacy for all children.

Looking at the Districts' Approaches: Recommendations for Leaders

No two change efforts are alike. Contextual and human variables make even the most rigid models bend. When, as in the case of the two districts highlighted in this document, the models are "home-grown," the path to replication often becomes a virtual maze. Nevertheless, after looking at each model along several dimensions, we will venture a recommendation to district and school leaders specific to that dimension. In order of occurrence, the five dimensions include

- Stated problem or need
- Start-up response
- Start-up results
- Refinement and scaling-up
- Results of refinement and scaling-up

1. Stated problem or need. Leading change in reading at the district level can be a daunting task. The success of the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County and Surry County school districts' efforts to effect positive change in reading literacy indicate that some problem or need was clearly and pervasively articulated. Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County simply wanted to move the large numbers of students reading below grade-level to higher levels of achievement. Surry County wanted to meet the needs of all children. Leaders in both districts, however, concluded that teachers were inadequately prepared by their preservice institutions to teach reading and writing. The districts admitted neither definition, goals, nor strategies of reading instruction were commonly understood by all concerned. Even when an approach to literacy was more or less agreed upon, as in the case of Surry County's affinity for "balance," teachers remained inconsistent in implementing it.

Recommendation #1: *Identify and define the problem thoroughly.*

2. Start-up Response. All change efforts must begin somewhere and with someone. Surry County leaders embodied the slow and steady, bottom-up approach. Over a five-year period, they facilitated teachers' voluntary attendance at weekend training sessions, offering little incentive beyond the opportunity to improve professionally. Alternately, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank leaders used the one-year opportunity to be a state accountability plan pilot site and employed an administrative retreat to jump-start their change effort. Through a process of data analysis, their principals discovered which students were not succeeding at their schools and how to match instructional strategies with identified weaknesses. Elizabeth City-Pasquotank leaders also recognized that reading for meaning and writing effectively required higher-order thinking skills from students. Accordingly, they hired a consultant to work with teachers on *Thinking Maps* strategies. Both districts employed one consultant over a period of years. Neither looked for a quick-fix; instead, they compiled and utilized research, read widely, and developed their people.

Recommendation #2: *Use research; start where it's right for you; and use long-term consultants to improve teachers' capacity.*

3. Start-up Results. As a consequence of their initial efforts, both Surry County and Elizabeth City-Pasquotank educators pointed to incidental improved literacy outcomes from students. Surry County recognized, however, that they still experienced only "pockets of success" existing in the classrooms of teachers who participated in the weekend training sessions. Similarly, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County leaders produced a common reference to serve as an

instructional and philosophical resource, but the resulting "Communication Skills Framework" was not initially accepted by all teachers. Moreover, the rubrics for teachers' self-assessment were also viewed by some as a veiled attempt for administrators to play "gotcha!" Clearly, more work was needed on both districts' part before change in reading literacy instruction would get more than a toe-hold.

📖 ***Recommendation #3:*** *Use initial results to improve the change effort, and keep thinking!*

4. Refinement and Scaling-Up. Learning from their initial attempts to improve reading and writing instruction, leaders in both districts explored ways to refine and then scale-up their efforts. For Surry County, the refinement was made possible by the acquisition of Department of Public Instruction funds for staff development and the receipt of a Goals 2000 grant to support the lab school and its supporting components, including mentoring and the employment of a literacy specialist. Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County leaders, acknowledging the need for increased building-level involvement, created a Communication Skills Leadership Council with teacher representation from all elementary schools. Principals and teachers formed research study groups to explore literacy issues raised in the initial draft of the communication skills resource document. Recognizing the need for effective reading across the content areas, both districts are planning to broaden the scope of their work to middle and high schools.

📖 ***Recommendation #4:*** *Involve all stakeholders—those in the district as well as state and federal agencies—in refining and scaling-up the change effort.*

5. Results of Refinement and Scaling-up. Surry County leaders report that students in the classrooms of teachers trained in *Developing Efficient Readers* typically attained above-average proficiency in reading, had positive attitudes toward reading, and had meta-cognition about their reading strategies. Remarkably, last year's test results showed that all Surry County elementary schools achieved "expected growth," two-thirds met the "exemplary growth" standard, and one earned a "School of Distinction" under the ABC Plan. Elizabeth City-Pasquotank leaders, too, explain their students' success in terms of the state accountability plan—the first year, 100 percent of their elementary schools showed "exemplary growth"; the second year, 75 percent attained at least the "expected growth" with four elementary schools maintaining "exemplary growth." These results were attained while testing over 98 percent of the student population. Emboldened by their successes, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank and Surry County leaders have subjected themselves to the scrutiny of their peers through state, regional, and national presentations. Their willingness to share their stories in this document attests to their recognition that even effective programs require continuous nurturing.

📖 ***Recommendation #5:*** *To keep progressing, publicize your progress.*

R&D Program Manager's Note

Note

SERVE recognizes that districts have a compelling role to play in the improvement of reading literacy. It is finally clear that central office staff can make a difference. Yet, while they can facilitate change, they cannot force it. SERVE wants to support the efforts of district leaders, principals, and teachers across the Southeast in building a regional community of learners. Consequently, in addition to releasing this document in print form, we are sharing it with readers of our Web site in the hope that, by using the pertinent guidelines, others will contribute their stories of districtwide reading improvement. You will find us at **www.serve.org.**

In addition to the narratives presented in this report, numerous documents created by each district exist that may assist district and school leaders in maximizing the benefit of *Leading Change in Literacy*. While we judged it beyond the scope of this report to reproduce these documents, you may acquire them and general programmatic information by contacting

Elizabeth Anne Neal,
Director of Federal Programs

Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Schools

P.O. Box 2247
1200 Halstead Boulevard
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Phone: 919-335-2981
Fax: 919-335-0974

and

Linda Tesh,
Director of Federal Programs,

Patsy Turner, Instructional Specialist,

or

Cherise Millsaps, Literacy Specialist

Surry County Schools

209 North Crutchfield Street
Dobson, NC 27017
Phone: 336-386-8211
Fax: 336-386-4279

End Notes

[1] Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990.

[2] Brandt, 1993.

[3] 1995.

[4] The SERVE Promising Practices District Reading Program Questionnaire may be found in Appendix A.

[5] Hyerle, 1995.

[6] 1996.

References

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1990). *Changing school culture through staff development*. B. Joyce (Ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Brandt, R. (October, 1993). "On Restructuring Roles and Relationships: A Conversation with Phil Schechty." *Educational leadership*, 51 (2), 8-11.

Tewel, K. J. (April, 1995). "Despair at the Central Office." *Educational leadership,* 52 (7), 65-68.

Appendix

SERVE Promising Practices District Reading Program Questionnaire

I. Overview of the Reading Literacy Program

A. What evidence of need for improved reading instruction existed?

B. What were the highlights in the evolution of the program?

II. Key Process Components

A. What ongoing staff support is provided?

B. What are some special training events?

C. How are parents involved?

D. What roles do principals and teachers play?

E. Who provides leadership?

F. How are proficiency standards for students developed?

III. Results and Recommendations

A. What results are you getting?

B. What have you learned from the project or program?

C. What do you think is the most successful aspect of your program?

D. What are your recommendations for other districts?

IV. General Information

A. School district name, address, phone and fax numbers

B. Superintendent and other key contacts' names

lĭt′ər-ə-sē

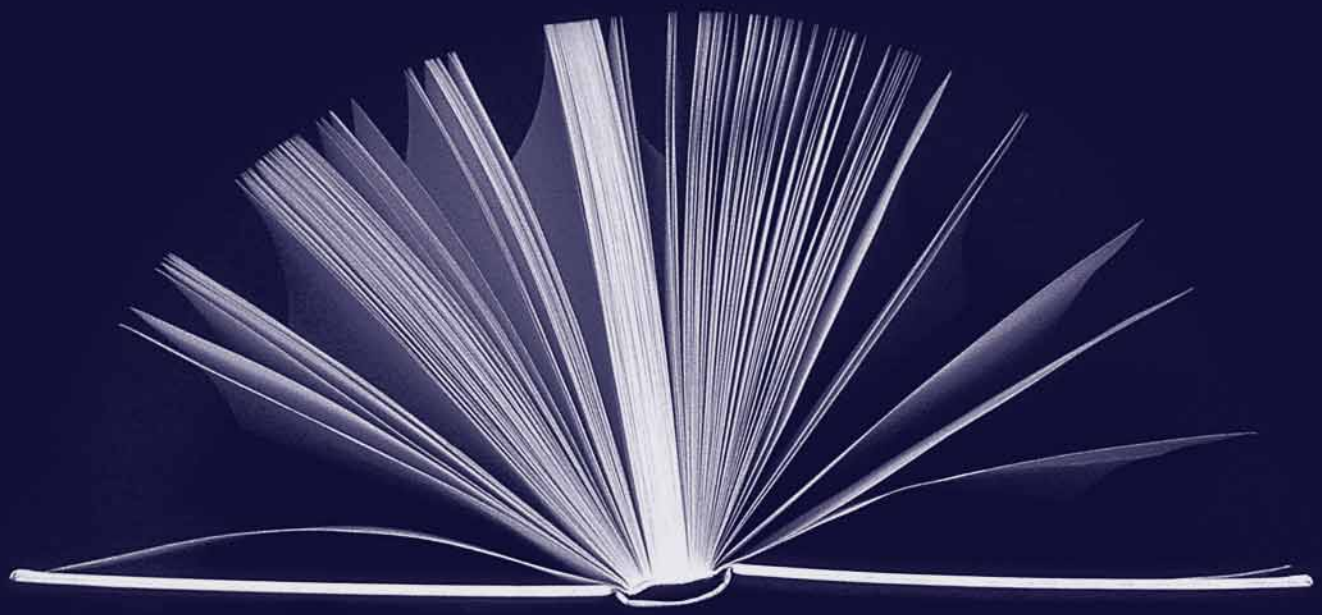
n. The condition or quality of being literate, esp. the ability to read and write

SHARING SUCCESS

LEADING CHANGE IN LITERACY

SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT STORIES

Do you have students who do not know how to read and write and teachers who do not know how to "fix" them? *Leading Change in Literacy* consists of three parts: First, Elizabeth Anne Neal describes how administrators, principals, and teachers in the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County school district went about changing its reading program. Next, Linda Tesh, Patsy Turner, and Cherise Millsaps depict Surry County's experience with the *Developing Efficient Readers* program. Finally, to guide educators considering districtwide reading literacy improvement, *Leading Change in Literacy* presents the commonalities and differences of each approach and makes recommendations for district leaders.



SSLCL
$6.00

SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education