

## ***EXPLORING READING NIGHTMARES OF MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS***

*Teachers* often feel unable or unwilling to teach *reading* in the content areas. By viewing *reading* as a lifelong process, these *teachers* can begin to support one another in helping students become better readers.

My nightmare is that I am insecure because as an English teacher, somehow I am expected to know about *reading*, but at the college level I was only trained in English content. (high *school* English teacher, 1996)

My nightmare is that many *middle school* students aren't *reading* at grade level, or if they are, won't read the class assignments anyway. Consequently, I find myself trying to avoid getting students involved in *reading* by assigning as little *reading* as possible. I teach around *reading* in order to make sure students understand science. (*middle school* science teacher, 1996)

I have been a *middle* grade and high *school* English/language arts teacher for over 10 years. During this time, I have had many *nightmares*, like the ones above, lurking in my *reading* closet. One nightmare in particular just never seemed to go away.

I was educated as a *middle* and *secondary school* English teacher. This experience taught me, among other things, how to plan *reading* assignments for junior and senior high *school* students. Unfortunately, it didn't teach me how to deal with students who were not very interested in or very good at *reading* these assignments. Many students flatly refused to read them. Others read the material, but only reluctantly, and more out of fear of reprisal from their parents for not completing their assignments than out of a burning desire to learn specific information. Still others read the material, but understood very little.

Even worse, this experience didn't teach me how to deal with students who wanted to read the assignments but struggled because they weren't very good readers. I didn't know how to help them because my teacher education program included no courses in *reading*. I knew that *reading* was critical to my content area, yet I knew very little about the *reading* process. Over time, I became increasingly frustrated and ineffective. Finally, I realized that I needed to learn more about the nature of *reading*.

Since then, I have spent much of my professional life learning about the complex nature of *reading*, *reading* instruction, and *reading* assessment in *middle* and *secondary school*. Specifically, I have tried to use my own experiences, as well as those of others, to think differently about my *reading nightmares*. The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) to share some *nightmares* that have plagued the field of *reading* education for some time by situating my nightmare within a larger historical context, (b) to share what junior high and senior high *school teachers* say about their own *reading nightmares*, and (c) to share what I have learned

from these *teachers* about some old problems and new possibilities in *reading* across the curriculum in *middle* and *secondary school*.

### ***Reading nightmares at national and state levels***

Recent U.S. research at both the national and state levels indicates that students experience a declining interest and slowing development in *reading* through the junior high and senior high *school* grades (Farr, Fay, Myers, & Ginsberg, 1987). For example, the 1986 National Assessment of Education Progress (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1988, p. 6) reported:

- Students have difficulty with tasks that require interpretations of what they have read.
- Poor readers have insufficient time in *school* for independent *reading* and do less independent *reading* than good readers.
- Poor readers use a narrower range of strategies to guide their own *reading* than good readers.
- Students from at-risk populations perform poorly when compared to the national population at each grade level.

Similarly, the 1990 National Assessment of Education Progress (Humphrey, 1992, p. 4-5) reported:

- ***Reading*** proficiency increases substantially from Grades 4 to 8 but less dramatically between Grades 8 and 12.
- Students do little *reading* in *school* and for homework.
- Interest in books decreases as students advance through *school*.
- Two thirds of fourth graders use the library at least weekly, compared to 24% of the eighth graders and 12% of 12th graders.
- Approximately one third of eighth and 12th graders say they never discuss *reading* at home.

Finally, the 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress (p. 1) reported:

- There is a slight decline in *reading* skills among 12th graders.
- Twenty-four percent of fourth graders, slightly more eighth graders, and more than 33% of 12th graders scored at a "proficient" level.
- Across fourth, eighth, and 12th grades, fewer than 5% reached an "advanced" level.

- At least 30% at each grade level failed to reach a "basic" level.

Similarly, Chall (1983) notes that "although students demonstrate gains in *reading* during the early years, these gains seem to taper off in the *middle* and upper grades, and decline during the high *school* years" (p. 4). Likewise, Anderson, Tollefson, and Gilbert (1985) use appetite as a metaphor to describe how "the *reading* diet of primary students far exceeds that of intermediate and *secondary* students--the primary students clearly demonstrate a much more voracious appetite for *reading* than do their older counterparts" (p. 189). How do we explain this trend? Here are some hints and hunches.

Goodlad (1984) suggests that part of the problem might exist in the relationship between *reading* decline and time spent on *reading* instruction, noting that "excluding the common *reading* activity of oral turn taking from a common text, *reading* occupies only approximately 6% of class time in elementary *school*, 3% in junior high *school*, and 2% in senior high *school*" (pp. 106-107). Humphrey (1992a) indicates that *reading* is losing the battle for time against an increasing amount of outside student interests, most notably television, noting that "nationally, 8th grade students spend an average of 21.4 hours per week watching television, but only 1.8 hours per week *reading* non-*school* materials" (p. 23). How much time are they spending per week *reading school*-based materials, assuming they are *reading* them at all?

Moreover, in a survey of the current status of *reading* in *middle*, junior, and senior high *schools* in one state, Humphrey (1992b, p. 2) reported the following:

- *Teachers* said that, on average, they spend less than 4 hours per year in staff development activities related to *reading*, including conferences, college or university classes, visitations, and locally sponsored meetings.
- Prior to the advent of junior high *schools* in the 1940s, most students had a *reading* period every day from the first through the eighth grades. Today, older students do not participate in *reading* classes or, when they do, they spend less time than in the past because *reading* has been merged with English/language arts. Almost one out of every five *middle*, junior, and senior high *school* students was not enrolled in a class where *reading* was emphasized during the 1991 *school* year.
- Thirty-eight percent of students whose *reading* ability falls two or more grade levels below their actual placement are not provided any special assistance. A quarter of the surveyed *schools* do not have remedial programs, while the others do not have enough support to provide help to all the students who need it. High *schools* offer the least assistance.
- Most of the *schools* surveyed reported that they provide neither programs that encourage *teachers* to share and discuss books nor programs that allow them to stress the value of *reading* books.

- **Middle** grades **schools** spend, on average, US\$1.92 per student per year on **reading** materials other than textbooks--less than the cost of one paperback.

### **Reading nightmares in reading education**

**Reading** education, as a professional field of study, has also been plagued by **nightmares**. For instance, consider that over 50 years ago Bond and Bond (1941) stated, "The fact that in the **secondary school** the continued improvement in **reading** has been left to chance is a dark cloud on the **reading** horizon. No better results should be expected from this procedure than from leaving a vegetable garden to grow by itself without any outside care after it is once started" (p. 53).

These educators were challenging a number of important assumptions about **reading** and **reading** instruction. These assumptions include (a) **Reading** instruction is primarily, if not exclusively, the role of elementary, not **middle** and **secondary, school teachers**; and (b) **reading** is an isolated skill; once it is mastered in the elementary grades, students require no further direct instruction in the upper grade levels.

What is nightmarish is that these assumptions, and many others like them, remain prevalent in **middle** and **secondary school**. It is assumed that providing **reading** instruction is the job of elementary, not **secondary, teachers**, and that students should be entering junior and senior high **school** already knowing how to read proficiently and strategically. But they aren't.

In addition, consider the following. In 1963, Umans wrote: "One of the most difficult tasks is to help subject-matter **teachers** see the necessity of teaching skills directly related to the **reading** of the particular subject. Somehow, the feeling persists that **reading** is always taught 'elsewhere' and 'at another time'" (p. 7).

Similarly, in 1965, Andresen (in Burnett, 1966) stated: "High **school teachers** must face their responsibilities as **teachers of reading** as well as **teachers** of history, literature, science, and home-making if they are to prepare students for the demands of further education or for the experience of life" (p. 323).

In 1964, Artley (in Burnett, 1966) wrote: "**Secondary reading** is changing as large numbers of **secondary school** people administrators, curriculum consultants and coordinators, **teachers**, and **reading** specialists-are beginning to concede that to accept anything less than the eventual involvement of every teacher in the **reading** program of the high **school** is to fall short of meeting the needs of today's students" (p. 323).

In 1965, Summers (see also Muskopf & Robinson, 1966, p. 76) stated: "Perhaps the most immediate concern in meeting the **reading** needs of **secondary** students is staffing **schools** with **teachers** who have the necessary training to provide adequate instruction in **reading** in their content subjects" (p. 94).

These educators were challenging a number of assumptions driving the role of *teachers* in *secondary school*, as well as calling for substantive changes in teacher education programs. For instance, Andresen and Artley were challenging the assumption that *secondary school teachers* are strictly subject specialists, *teachers* of content, and not *teachers* of *reading*. They were calling for a new perception and a new definition of what it means to teach in *secondary school*. Specifically, they were proposing that every *secondary school* teacher be perceived as, and educated to be, both a subject specialist and a teacher of *reading*. Thus, *teachers* who assigned *reading* in their content area were obligated to help students read the materials that were assigned. Summers (1965), however, warned that in order to do this preservice *teachers* would need "the necessary training" in *reading* in the content areas as part of their teacher training program.

What seems nightmarish is that many of these calls have gone virtually unanswered. Today, several trends remain prevalent in *secondary* education: (a) *Secondary school teachers* continue to see themselves primarily, if not exclusively, as *teachers* of content, not *teachers* of *reading*; (b) to a large extent *secondary school teachers* believe that if *reading* needs to be taught in *secondary school*, it should be integrated into the language arts curriculum and taught by English *teachers*; and (c) students (typically English majors) majoring in *secondary* education and enrolled in teacher education programs continue to receive very little education (typically one course) in the area of *reading* in general, and *reading* across the curriculum in particular.

Finally, consider the following. In 1964, Artley (in Burnett, 1966) predicted: "When the history of *reading* instruction is written it will show that one of the major points of emphasis of the 1960's will be the organized extension of the developmental *reading* program into the *secondary* grade" (p. 323).

Likewise, in 1966 Burnett predicted: "Perhaps the teaching of *reading* will become accepted as an integral part of the high *school* curriculum before the elapse of another 25 years" (p. 328).

At the time, these educators were making powerful and hopeful predictions for the future of *reading* and *reading* instruction in *secondary school*. These predictions, however, appear not to have been correct. On the one hand, Artley (in Burnett, 1966, p. 323) predicted that "the organized extension of the developmental *reading* program into the *secondary* grade," a major emphasis of the 1960s, would continue into the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and into the 21st century. Excluding remedial *reading* programs, very little progress has been made on extending developing *reading* programs into *secondary* education. Similarly, Burnett (1966) predicted that *reading* would become an integral part of the high *school* curriculum. Yet, 30 years later, the teaching of *reading* in *secondary* education continues to be at best an infrequent visitor, and at worst a total stranger, across the high *school* curriculum.

### ***Reading nightmares in teacher voices***

*Secondary teachers* experience *reading nightmares* every day in the classroom. One way to understand these *nightmares* is to listen to a variety of teacher voices.

Over the past 3 years, I have conducted a number of professional development workshops on *reading* across the curriculum for *middle school* and high *school teachers*. I began these workshops with an oral *reading* of *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* (Mayer, 1968), a humorous fantasy about a little boy who confronts his fear of the dark by planning to "get rid of the nightmare once and for all." After *reading*, I explained that I wanted to use this story as a metaphor for hearing some new voices and starting some new conversations about *reading*. To this end, I modified the title to read *There's a Nightmare in My Reading Closet*, and used it as an invitation to *teachers* to explore and share *reading nightmares*.

Specifically, I invited *teachers* to spend a few minutes thinking about their past experiences with *reading* in the classroom. Then, I asked them to write responses to the following prompts:

- There's a nightmare in my *reading* closet ...
- Some pluses ...
- Some questions ...
- And one wish ...

The first prompt invited *teachers* to jot down some *reading nightmares*; some problems, issues, or concerns with which they were struggling. The second prompt invited them to share some successes with *reading* that they had experienced in the classroom. The third prompt invited *teachers* to record some questions that they were currently asking themselves for which they did not have answers. The fourth prompt invited *teachers* to make a wish that would enable them to "get rid of my nightmare once and for all."

A total of 131 *teachers* provided responses across these four prompts. Of these, 29 taught in *middle school* and 102 in high *school*.

First, I read nonstop through all the responses, recording no comments and not stopping for any length of time to reflect on what I was *reading*. At this point I was trying to get a preliminary understanding and intuitive feeling by constantly asking "What are these teacher voices really saying?" Second, I read through the responses more critically and reflectively, trying to construct working hypotheses. Here, I was trying to see some preliminary categories and patterns by constantly asking "What do these *teachers* really mean?" Third, I read through the responses focusing on refining emerging patterns by constantly asking "What do these *teachers* mean collectively?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Figure is a sample of teacher voices across content areas. For identification purposes, MS

indicates *middle school* teacher and HS indicates high *school* teacher. Different content areas are also identified.

### Learning new lessons

I have learned several new lessons about the current status of *reading* from listening to *middle* and *secondary school teachers* talk about *reading nightmares* across the curriculum. These *nightmares* will be very familiar to many *middle* and *secondary school* English/language arts *teachers*, which suggests that little has changed over the years; indeed, if anything, it indicates that things have gotten worse.

However, what seems most problematic is that these voices have become more collective and less individual. That is, different *teachers* across the curriculum use different words to describe their individual *nightmares*, but they are all saying essentially the same thing. For example, math *teachers* state that students can't read and understand math problems; science *teachers* state that students can't read texts to conduct laboratory experiments; home economics *teachers* state that students don't understand and therefore can't follow instructions; industrial arts and vocational education *teachers* state that students can't read and don't follow procedures and thus often put themselves in physical danger when operating certain machinery and equipment; English *teachers* state that students can't read and don't comprehend poems, short stories, and novels.

Each personal voice describes a shared professional reality: Increasing numbers of *middle* and *secondary school* students do not perceive *reading* as meaningful, and thus do not value the act or the process. These students are apathetic, almost disdainful, about *reading*. As a result, increasing numbers of *teachers* are left feeling bewildered and frustrated, almost paralyzed, about how to teach. This situation is further exacerbated for *teachers* working in a climate of high-stakes assessment where the improvement (or lack thereof) in test scores across individual content areas determines the extent to which *schools* and *teachers* are rewarded or punished.

Students' reasons for devaluing *reading* as they progress through *middle* and *secondary school* are complex. Yet, these voices indicate that *teachers* across the curriculum share a common conception of what the problem is and a set of interrelated beliefs that partially explain why it currently exists.

By breaking down any complex problem into components and discussing each one there is the risk of oversimplifying, and even diluting, the very complexity of the problem. Therefore, readers are urged to keep in mind the advice of Carolyn Burke (personal correspondence, 1993): "We certainly can talk about complex problems in simple terms, but that no less reduces their complexity."

Problem: Students can't read, won't read, or will read but fail to comprehend most important

information from text.

Belief 1: "It's a student thing ..." **Teachers** across the curriculum see the problem with **reading** as a student thing. Students can't read, are passive, and are reluctant to read because they do not find **school**-based **reading** personally meaningful or socially relevant to their lives. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that many students do not have a history of success and enjoyment with **reading**. Over time, students do not gain the positive experiences necessary to be successful readers. As a result, as they progress through formal schooling, students become less able to comprehend increasingly complex texts. Frustration begets frustration and failure begets failure, until at the high **school** level students not only devalue, but virtually dismiss, **reading** as a tool to learn.

Belief 2: "It's a teacher thing ..." **Teachers** in **middle** and **secondary school** believe some of the problems associated with **reading** are really a teaching thing. On the one hand, they believe that if students at age 16, for example, would bring to the classroom the same curiosity about **reading** and learning that children do at age 6, then they would not have to deal with **reading** at all. However, since it is clear that **reading** needs to be addressed, they prefer that others deal with the problem (e.g., "I wish I had an English teacher with my class to help with **reading** and writing"). Few believe that all **teachers** are ultimately **teachers** of **reading**, despite the obvious need to be so.

**Teachers** expressed a number of personal and professional reasons for having difficulty dealing with **reading**. Surprisingly, many **teachers** do not necessarily see themselves as voracious and sophisticated readers, unless perhaps when **reading** in their specific content area. Not surprisingly, then, they find it difficult to see themselves teaching **reading**, much less being able to motivate others to read.

It is also not surprising that at a professional level **teachers** express betrayal, frustration, and confusion. In an interesting turn of events, it is now **teachers** who feel "at risk." **Teachers** feel betrayed because they were given no formal knowledge of **reading** in their teacher education training, frustrated because they have no personal experience with the teaching of **reading**, and confused because the number of **reading** specialists in **schools** is being reduced at the same time administrators are calling for improvements in **reading** scores. Moreover, **teachers** feel overwhelmed because they were "trained and hired to teach content, but are now being asked to also teach **reading**."

The bottom line is that **teachers** feel they are being asked to teach what they do not know how to teach in addition to an already bloated curriculum in their content area. Individuals who know the least about **reading** are being asked to teach **reading** to students who need it the most.

Belief 3: "It's a textbook thing ..." **Teachers** also believe that **reading** problems may be related to textbooks. Increasing numbers of **teachers** are starting to seriously question the efficacy of

using a single text as the basis for instruction in content areas. *Teachers* believe that many textbooks are written at a level far above the current *reading* abilities of students, and thus are unnecessarily confusing and complex. They also believe that textbooks are strictly content driven, and therefore are boring and uninteresting to students.

In addition, *teachers* believe that the use of a single textbook is driven by a "one size fits all mentality." The assumption is that one book can accommodate different personal interests and varied *reading* abilities. *Teachers* across the curriculum know firsthand that students bring with them into the classroom different histories of *reading*, and therefore different values about *reading* and the role it plays in their lives. They also know that a single textbook can't and doesn't accommodate the students' wide range of *reading* abilities. A more powerful assumption is that varied *reading* materials can better accommodate varied *reading* abilities.

What is problematic about this assumption is that for the most part *middle* and *secondary school teachers* have had little experience and even less formal education in selecting alternative or supplementary *reading* materials. Another problem is that in moving to a multiple-text versus a single-text mentality, *teachers* feel caught between (a) trying to accommodate students' *reading* needs while meeting the curricular demands of the *school* and (b) trying to balance *reading* of student-selected materials with teacher-assigned materials deemed important for content area knowledge.

Belief 4: "It's a somebody else thing ..." Finally, *middle* and *secondary school teachers* believe parents, colleagues, and elementary *school teachers* contribute to the problem of *reading* in junior and senior high *school*. Parents, for example, do not seem to stress and support *reading* at home as in years past. Instead, *reading* at home has been replaced by watching television and playing video games to the point where *reading* struggles, mostly unsuccessfully, to compete for young people's time.

Similarly, many *teachers* believe that colleagues do not recognize and stress the importance of *reading* and teaching *reading* across the curriculum in *middle* and *secondary school*. The pervasive view is that *teachers* don't and won't take responsibility for what they believe was the irresponsibility of others who were obviously remiss in their duty to teach children how to read. This view is perhaps best expressed by one high *school* teacher who stated: "It seems that not only am i now expected to teach what I don't know, which is *reading*, because those who preceded me didn't teach it, but also I am now being held accountable with *reading*, which is like me being held responsible for others' irresponsibility."

In many cases, the "others" referred to are elementary *school teachers*. To a large extent, upper level *teachers* believe that primary grade *teachers* simply aren't teaching children the basic skills of how to read, or are not recognizing and remediating *reading* problems early enough. As a result, when elementary *teachers* promote children who can't or don't like to read, *middle* and *secondary school teachers* feel they, not parents or the elementary *teachers*, have to suffer the consequences.

### *Exploring new possibilities*

I began this article by identifying some old *reading nightmares* of *middle* and *secondary teachers*. Their voices, heard collectively, represent a constellation of individual realities that, up to this point, depict the current status of *reading* mostly in terms of problems. Now, I want to focus on *exploring* new possibilities because, as Harste (see Crafton et al., 1995) once stated, "when reality becomes synonymous with possibility, it is time to get out of the teaching profession." In essence, *exploring* new possibilities means creating new realities for *teachers* and students. To this end, I want to propose several starting points for seeing new possibilities in *reading*.

It seems obvious that colleges and universities need to reevaluate and rethink the role *reading* education plays within the teacher education curriculum. Otherwise, universities will continue to graduate students who are not only unaware of the nature of *reading* and the important role it plays in learning, but also ill-equipped to teach *reading* in a content area, much less across the curriculum. Clearly, preservice *teachers* need significantly more understanding of *reading* and experience teaching it to meet the complex demands of teaching *reading* in *middle* and *secondary school*. Therefore, universities need to increase the quantity and enhance the quality of experiences that preservice *teachers* have in teacher education programs.

Moreover, *school* districts and state departments of education need to reexamine the current level of commitment in the area of *reading*. *Teachers* need and want more information about and more experience with teaching *reading*. Otherwise, they will continue to feel uninformed and therefore unable to help those students who need help the most. *Teachers* will also continue to feel frustrated given the fact that, with or without additional help in *reading*, *school* districts and departments of education are still holding them accountable for students' *reading* across the content areas. *Schools*, *school* districts, and state departments of education also need to hold themselves accountable. This means providing ongoing professional development that will support *teachers* in better understanding the complex nature of *reading* and the art of teaching *reading* to adolescents in *middle school* and young adults in *secondary school*.

*Schools* can help themselves by intentionally and systematically making *reading* a high priority with students and *teachers*. *Schools* can intentionally create a climate that says to *teachers* in professional ways and to students in practical ways that "we value *reading* in this *school*." For example, *schools* can (a) plan ongoing professional staff development for *teachers* in *reading* across the curriculum; (b) organize in-*school* programs that encourage students and *teachers* to read; (c) assist *teachers* in building collaborative relationships with representatives of trade book companies to explore what *reading* materials beyond textbooks are currently available for use in the classroom; (d) create a faculty library replete with a variety of resources on recent advances in *reading*, *reading* instruction, and *reading* assessment in *middle* and *secondary school*; (e) invite *teachers* from across the curriculum to share *reading* strategies with

colleagues at faculty meetings; and (f) provide **teachers** with time and encouragement to discuss with colleagues what new insights about **reading** and teaching they learned from trying new strategies in the classroom.

On a practical level, **teachers** can (a) use mini-lessons on **reading** as a part of their daily or weekly lesson plans, to provide powerful demonstrations to students of what good readers do when they read; (b) use different frameworks to support **reading** across the curriculum such as literature circles (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988), readers workshop (Atwell, 1987), **reading** aloud, paired **reading**, and **reading** response logs (Rief, 1992); (c) set up a Readers in Residence program as a part of a library media center, in which student volunteers help other students with **reading**; and (d) begin faculty meetings and even the **school** day with an oral **reading** of a children's picture book, poem, short fable, or an excerpt from a short story, novel, or play. The idea here is to help **teachers** and students change their old perception of **reading** in order to create a new reality that sees **reading** less as a nagging problem, and more as a tool for learning and thinking.

Changing perceptions of **reading**, however, is no small task. For instance, all too often **teachers** in **middle** and **secondary school** assume that the solution to **reading** problems is primarily an instructional issue. That is, **teachers** feel they lack a variety of **reading** strategies that they could use to spark student interest, which, in turn, could help them better comprehend complex **reading** assignments. This assumption partially explains why **teachers** associated **reading** pluses mostly in terms of individual **reading** activities and popular **reading** programs (see Figure). These pluses are important. They indicate that **teachers** are aware of **reading** problems, and are **exploring** different strategies to incorporate **reading** into their content area. Perhaps **teachers** will start some new conversations about the power and potential of teaching **reading** across the curriculum, based on experiences using these strategies in the classroom.

Changing perceptions of **reading**, however, has to occur on at least two levels--one instructional, the other theoretical and curricular. Solving **reading** problems is not just a matter of **teachers** using more informed instructional techniques, although that is clearly a step in the right direction. It also involves a commitment by **teachers** to interrogate assumptions about learning and conceptions of curriculum that underpin different methods of **reading** instruction. **Teachers** should question to what extent these assumptions represent the best we currently know about learning and **reading**. The solution also requires **teachers** to see their instructional strategies as expressions of their personal values about how people learn in general, and learn to read in particular, and to reflect on the extent to which these values reflect recent advances in learning and **reading** theory.

What **teachers** value most can be seen by looking at what they devote the most time to. Conversely, what **teachers** don't value tends not to be included in the curriculum or present in the classroom. In this instance, teacher voices across the curriculum echoed some discomfort

with what they have valued over the years, and *teachers* are starting to change what they value most with *reading*. This shift was expressed by one high *school* teacher who said, "I've been a social studies teacher now for 25 years, and I'm starting to think that maybe, just maybe, students have a problem in *reading* because as *teachers* we've been valuing the wrong things all this time."

For instance, some *teachers* are placing more value on the social nature of *reading*; that is, on the view that *reading* is not strictly an individual activity, but a social engagement. Others value integrating *reading* with other disciplines, such as writing, art, and drama. Still others are using a wider variety of materials and supporting self-selection, and using *reading* materials that are personally meaningful and socially relevant to students.

Perhaps most important, however, is that *teachers* are placing more value on the notion that an interest in *reading* is ultimately an interest in learning. For instance, elementary, *middle*, and high *school teachers* all believe that learning to learn is a lifelong process, and that *schools* are designed to help students become more informed and more sophisticated learners as they progress through different grade levels. *Teachers* have not necessarily believed that learning to read is also a lifelong process, and that one of the purposes of *schools* is to help students become more strategic readers. Rather, *teachers* have assumed that students learned to read in elementary *school* and then read to learn in *middle* and *secondary school*.

Now, *middle* and *secondary school teachers* are placing more value on the notion that learning to read and *reading* to learn are actually the same process. This means that individuals of all ages have the potential to learn about *reading* and from *reading*. In this sense, *reading* isn't something children learn to do just in elementary *school*. Rather, learning to read and *reading* to learn are interrelated processes that lifelong learners do to outgrow what they currently know and believe about the social world.

Interestingly enough, placing more value on the interrelationship between learning to read and *reading* to learn also opens up the door for new relationships between elementary *school* and *middle* and *secondary school teachers*. By seeing *reading* as a lifelong process, *teachers* in Grades K-12 can start some new conversations about how they can support one another in helping all students become better readers and better learners. Moreover, by seeing *reading* as a tool for learning, *teachers* can help one another not only to use *reading* to spark student interest in content area learning, but also to use content area learning to spark interest in *reading*.

In this sense, teaching *reading* in *middle* and *secondary school* isn't just an addition to an already bloated curriculum; it also provides the potential for *teachers* to use *reading* to create personally meaningful curriculum with students. In the long run, these new values may not be a cure for all our *reading nightmares*, but at least we will be able to teach better by day and sleep better at night.

## Teacher voices across the curriculum

Legend for Chart:

- A - Content area
- B - **Reading nightmares**
- C - **Reading** pluses
- D - **Reading** questions
- E - **Reading** wishes

A

- B
- C
- D
- E

Science

My nightmare is **reading** comprehension. Students don't comprehend well because many are very behind with **reading** abilities to begin with, plus a majority of science textbooks are written on a level well above most high **school** students (HS).

Using groups to do **reading** assignments, and tying assignments to everyday life.

Why can't the state revise its textbook adoption list?  
How can I get students to read assignments in science textbooks when the text can often be very difficult to understand?

I wish that all kids coming to us could read. I also wish that all students would strive for learning and read instead of watching television and playing video games.

Science

I have a two-part nightmare: One, very few of my students will actually read the textbook. They depend on me for lecture notes or simply read a question and search for similar words in the text. Two, most students are not intrigued with science literature. They pass it off as boring. I feel this may come due to their lack of vocabulary and **reading** skills (HS).

Using role-playing models, getting students to read an article dealing with science and then describe what it has to do with their life, and writing a children's science book and illustrating it.

How can I get vital information across without **reading**? How do I make factual **reading** more interesting?

I wish every student would come to high **school** still hungry to learn like small children are.

Math

My nightmare is that students will have trouble comprehending and I won't know how to help them, and/or students won't be motivated to read and I'll have to make them (MS).

**Exploring** whole language and selecting materials that related to students, not **teachers**.

How can I use children's books in math? How can I teach **reading** in my math class without getting away from the math material I'm supposed to teach?

I wish I knew how to teach **reading** and math together.

Math

Having uninteresting textbooks, and no experience choosing material that gets students involved and reaches all levels of students (MS).

I'm increasing the use of word problems that reflect everyday life.

How do I get more involved in **reading** when I don't read much myself?

I wish to have total class participation.

Math

Working with students with large differences in **reading** ability, being able to help poor readers enjoy **reading** which, in turn, will keep their attention, and helping students use **reading** to broaden their interests (MS).

I am trying to spark student interest by finding more interesting **reading** materials.

How do I learn about strategies that incorporate **reading** and math?

I wish that all students enjoyed *reading* and were competent readers. This would make teaching subjects a lot easier.

#### Math

So many students struggle in math because of not being able to read and understand the problem, and I don't have time to go back and teach them how to comprehend what they are *reading* (HS).

Many students can read; in fact, they want to read all the time. I have to make them put down their books in order to have math class.

How am I able to help students comprehend what they are *reading* when no one else has?

I wish elementary *teachers* would recognize problems in *reading* and correct them early.

#### Math

Many students make it through elementary and *middle school* and still do not know how to read. Others can call out all of the words, but they don't understand what it means.

I am asking students to restate word problems in their own words.

How do I have time to work on *reading* when I don't have time to present the subject matter I teach? Do other math *teachers* have trouble incorporating *reading* into math?

I wish I had more resources for *reading* in math. Also, I wish I had an English teacher with my class to help with *reading* and writing.

#### Social studies

Students don't read assigned materials. Often, *reading* a textbook chapter brings a "I'd rather take a zero" from most students. Social studies is not the least bit interesting to students (HS).

Doing journal writing, *reading* newspapers, and making children's books about historical people and events.

How can I get students to read something and relate

the information to the class?

I wish all students had that certain something inside themselves to motivate themselves and realize the importance of education and how much they're missing now instead of realizing it later on in life.

#### Social studies

There are so many students in my classes who are not proficient readers. They are so far behind many of the other students that they have basically given up and have quit trying in **school** (HS).

I am allowing them more time to read in class.

How can I reach those students who have little ability in **reading** and also supply the needs of those students who are proficient readers?

I want to be effective in helping students to understand the importance of history enough that they will be interested in **reading** about it.

#### Social studies

My nightmare is that I really don't know how to choose literature that both the high and low level children can enjoy and understand (MS).

Literature today seems more diverse and there is more integration in the classroom.

How do you find a balance between assigning good literature and assigning literature that will be of interest to students?

I wish history **teachers** would incorporate more fiction/literature into the curriculum.

#### Social studies

My nightmare is not only that I might have a student who can barely read, but also students who read better than I do. While **reading** out loud, I am afraid I will stammer, stutter, or mispronounce a word (MS).

Setting aside time for **reading**, and making books accessible to all ranges of students.

How do I get students to read when they are so

apathetic? How can I get my students interested in **reading** about history when most history books are so boring, and that's why students have such dislike for the subject?

I wish that I can instill in my students a love for **reading**.

English

Students are not motivated to read the assignments I give, or if they do read they are often misinformed or get a confusing view of the material (MS).

Using prereading strategies and guiding questions during free **reading** time.

How do I make sure that students grasp the important concepts in **reading**?

I want to be able to motivate students to want to read for more than just because they have to.

English

My nightmare is that kids will leave this high **school** and never read again because they don't value **reading**. It doesn't seem important to them (HS).

Using **reading** logs, **reading** aloud, and integrating **reading** and writing.

How do we **teachers** get away from depending on only one way of teaching **reading**?

I wish that every teacher regardless of the content area would recognize the importance of **reading**.

English

My nightmare is that students can read the words on the page, but have difficulty comprehending what they are **reading** (HS).

Allowing students choice in required **reading**. Ownership is important in **reading**.

What is the best method for assessing **reading** comprehension?

I wish I had the power to motivate students to read

and love it.

#### Art

My nightmare is that people will grow less and less aware of the importance and the power of words--that they will read only insofar as they must and will not know the joy and triumph of being able to share subtle, precise thoughts and feelings by **reading**.

I am assigning drawing and painting projects students must complete by **reading**. They learn that drawing provides evidence of comprehension.

What do i do about the great discrepancy between students of different **reading** and ability levels?

I wish students could see words as elements of art, as lines, texture, colors, shapes, which compose beautiful individual statements from the heart.

#### Title I

I have a fifth grader **reading** at a third-grade level. I help him pronounce words, and he'll get it once, but when asked a minute later he can't remember (MS).

I am using the accelerated **reading** program. It's helping.

How can I get curiosity and excitement towards a textbook?

I wish I could stop time so I could catch all kids up in **reading**.

#### Home economics

My nightmare is that many of my students read and write so poorly that they are unable to help their own children with simple tasks (HS).

I have students develop lessons where they read to children in our preschool program.

How do I actually teach **reading** skills within a content area, like home economics?

I wish that students would be able to use what they learn in **school** to have a more viable life.

## Foreign language

Finding ways to get my students to read about other cultures that will interest them without sacrificing the integrity of what I want them to know. This is becoming increasingly more difficult because as a rule students read even less than they did in the past (HS).

I am using simple novels that students enjoy *reading*. It seems that everyone can get involved in a good story.

How can I teach foreign language to students who have no grasp of English?

I wish *reading* were an inborn, genetic gift that did not have to be taught, but rather could be expanded on through interest surveys and discussion.

## Vocational education

Students do not absorb what they read and usually do not pass a test or quiz over what they just read. Also, some students do well at *reading* and like to read while others sit and stare into space (HS).

Using *reading* in labs, and providing time to read.

How much time should I spend on *reading*? How do students respond to *reading*?

I wish I had more time for *reading* and that students would enjoy *reading* and take time to do it.

## Industrial arts

My nightmare is that students can't comprehend the materials selected for my course, including *reading* simple instructions and taking tests (HS).

I'm trying to connect industrial arts to real life situations.

Exactly what should students be able to understand when *reading*?

I wish I had time to read what I want rather than what I must, and that students would read and comprehend all assignments.

Administrator

As a principal my nightmare is students that are nonreaders or whose **reading** performance is far below their peers, and that fewer of these students now qualify for assistance through special education (MS).

Our **school** is now emphasizing trade books and using **Reading Is Fundamental** and Book It.

How do we give individualized **reading** instruction without pullout programs like Title I?

I wish that all children would have print-rich home environments with timers on TV and video games.

Administrator

**Reading** scores are low and declining, and yet due to staff reduction and cutbacks, we have had to reassign and lay off our sixth-grade **reading teachers** (MS).

**Reading** accountability has been moved up to seventh grade.

How can we better integrate **reading** across the curriculum?

I wish we could raise our **reading** scores.

Administrator

Children are learning to read, but the pressures of standardized testing and educational reform soon have us focusing on other disciplines such as math and science, saying we are "integrating" **reading** when in fact we slight the advances that would assist students in later life (HS).

Some **teachers** are using the accelerated **reading** program.

Will the controversy between whole language and phonics take center stage rather than focus on improving **reading** skills?

I wish that every student would be **reading** at grade level or above.

Administrator

I have two *nightmares*. One is all too often a simple method of teaching *reading* is employed for all with not enough emphasis on allowing student interest and curiosity to drive *reading*. And two, *reading* is not being adequately integrated across the curriculum (MS).

Basals are not the only way. Books and choices of *reading* are great. We are trying to use a wider variety of topics and thematic instruction.

Why do students dislike *reading* after the first or second grade? Why is *reading* such a struggle for the majority of students?

I wish children could be children and take the time they need to question and learn.

Administrator

That *teachers* do not have enough training in the *reading* process and not see all the connections involved in skills instruction (MS).

I am trying to do some continuous training in *reading* instruction.

How can we find, select, and use materials that better reflect student interest and *reading* ability?

I wish that *teachers* would believe that when kids are having problems in *reading* there may not be anything wrong with the child, but rather there may be something wrong with the way they are teaching the child.

Administrator

My nightmare is that few high *school teachers* assume any responsibility for helping kids learn to read (HS).

Trying to connect *reading* and real-life situations to help kids get past just calling words.

What training exists to help content area *teachers* better understand how high *school* age students learn to read and how *teachers* can incorporate *reading* across content areas?

I wish that the walls come down; that is, that *school*

truly becomes a learning center for all on that site.

Undeclared

My nightmare is that students empty of good *reading* experiences are drowning with demands to read chapters of text they do not relate to and failing because of "lack of effort."

Making connections between *reading* and writing, and increasing choices in *reading*.

How can we change the idea of *reading* instruction from isolated skills practice to real substance?

I wish that *teachers* and students would see themselves as thinkers who can read and write about their thoughts.

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