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Reading and the Whole Student

Having an effective reading curriculum in schools not only ensures that students become proficient readers but also affects their overall well-being and behavior.

By Laurice M. Joseph and Rebecca A. Schisler

Every educator understands that reading is essential to thriving in the world. It is fundamental to education, work, citizenship, and daily living. Most educators also recognize that producing a nation of proficient readers is one of their biggest challenges. Approximately 23 million of the 70 million school-age students in the United States are not proficient readers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003), and only 28% of 8th graders and 34% of 12th graders are reading proficiently according to national standards. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, significant energy has been devoted to reversing this alarming level of illiteracy by mandating evidence-based reading instruction and outcome-based performance assessments in the primary grades. Little focus, however, has been given to promoting literacy development for secondary students.

Principals as Visionaries

The lack of attention given to effective reading instruction at the secondary

school level requires administrators to be visionaries and advocates for improving reading achievement in their schools. Reading proficiency is key in middle level and high school because it underlies learning in all content areas and, consequently, school success. Students who are proficient readers not only do better academically but also tend to be physically and mentally healthier than struggling readers (Brown-Chidsey, 2005). Limited reading proficiency hinders access to the curriculum; contributes to low self-esteem and poor motivation; can lead to inappropriate placement in special education; increases the risk of academic failure and dropping out of school; and is linked to behavior problems, delinquency, and such lifelong negative consequences as criminal activity and welfare dependency.

Minimizing these risks is the responsibility of all secondary educators. Principals need to lead the way by becoming knowledgeable about factors that affect reading achievement, such as evidence-based instructional prac-

tices, and sharing responsibility for improving students' reading proficiency with teachers.

The Struggling Reader

A variety of factors contribute to reading difficulties, including learning or developmental disability, low cognitive ability, poor acquisition of fundamental reading skills, inadequate instruction over time, poverty, and lack of family or environmental support to encourage reading. Students generally do not become struggling readers in secondary school but usually have struggled from an early age. By the time they reach middle level or high school, poor readers perceive themselves as "failures" or incompetent. They often cannot read passages beyond first and second grade levels independently because they do not possess word identification strategies. They read at very slow rates that prevent them from developing higher comprehension and vocabulary (Pressley, 1998). Slogging through increasingly dense textbooks, discerning more-complex instructions, and completing more-sophisticated writing assignments can be nearly impossible.

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Reading Intervention Strategies

Incremental rehearsal has been used across age groups, including adults with literacy problems (Burns & Kimosh, in press) and is a drill rehearsal technique (see MacQuarrie, Tucker, Burns, & Hartman, 2002) that is designed to teach unknown words by interspersing 90% known with 10% unknown words. This technique can be used to help students acquire, retain, and become fluent at reading words.

Repeated reading is a very effective oral reading strategy for building fluency with reading words in connected text (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Essentially, students read and re-read a passage until they achieve mastery of it.

Peer-assisted reading involves pairing a struggling reader with a competent peer. The competent peer may serve as a model for the struggling reader by reading text aloud and demonstrating the use of comprehension strategies as well as providing corrective feedback (Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000).

Decoding (Englemann et al., 1999) has been effective for secondary students (Grossen, 2002) and involves explicit, systematic, fast-paced instruction to teach letter-sound correspondences and the pronunciation of affixes (single syllable and multisyllabic words). The lessons include choral responding, corrective feedback, and opportunities to practice until mastery is obtained.

Word boxes, a modification of Marie Clay's (1993) letter boxes, help students make sequential one to one correspondences with letters and sounds (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Joseph, 2002). When

this procedure was implemented with juniors in high school who were reading at primary grade levels, the students not only experienced improved oral reading performance but also happily reported that they "were finally learning how to read" (Devault & Joseph, 2004).

Semantic maps may help students with vocabulary and conceptual relationships in narrative or expository texts (Novak & Musonda, 1991). Semantic maps can be either process-oriented or product-oriented. Process-oriented maps usually are completed before students read assigned material to help them establish some background knowledge (McCormick, 2003). This type of mapping requires that teachers prompt student responses. For example, a teacher may write a concept (e.g., satire) in a drawn box and ask the class to give examples of when they experience it. As the class responds, the teacher writes their comments below the concept. The teacher may then ask the class how it feels when they witness the concept and write their responses, drawing connecting lines to the other comments, and so forth. Product-oriented maps are produced as an outcome activity after students have read material.

Reciprocal teaching is a reading comprehension approach that has helped delayed secondary school readers catch up and even exceed typically developing readers (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). After students and the teacher read from common text, they talk about the reading material using strategies of predicting, question generating, summarizing, and clarifying text.

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Students' resulting frustration and their habit of failure require educators to address such factors as self-esteem, self-efficacy (i.e., attributing success to one's efforts), attitudes toward learning and school, and wellness (physical and emotional) while working to build reading skills. Secondary school students are less likely than younger students to work at a difficult task if they don't anticipate success and may blame imagined external factors (e.g., an unreasonable assignment) rather than their effort level if they fail (Joseph, 2002). They also may be embarrassed by their lack of reading competence, resulting in resistance to academic work across content areas. Teachers may need the assistance of the school psychologist to develop appropriate strategies to help students see themselves as capable and increase their motivation to become proficient readers and learners.

Targeting Critical Skills

Poor development of critical component literacy skills underlies poor reading at all ages (Moats, 2001) and building these core skills is as important for older students as for young children. It is essential that teachers work with a reading specialist or school psychologist to assess a student's specific skills deficits and identify the appropriate instruction strategies. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), there are four critical component skills of reading development:

Phonemic awareness pertains to being alert to and manipulating individual sounds (i.e., phonemes) in spoken words (Adams, 1990). Phonemic awareness activities include:

- Phoneme identification: identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds
- Phoneme blending: blending individual sounds to form whole words
- Phoneme segmentation: segmenting a whole word into each individual sound, such as articulating /c-a-t/ for the word "cat")
- Phoneme deletion, substitution, and addition: deleting a sound and forming

a word, such as deleting *m* from the word *man* and substituting it with *c* to form the word *can*, then adding *s* to form the word *scan*.

Phonemic awareness eases students' way on the "road to decode print" (Adams, 1990).

Alphabetic principle is knowledge of letter-sound associations (Adams, 1990). When students learn how to decode print, they will have strategies for reading words unknown to them. For example, if students can read the word *cat*, they may decode the word *catastrophe*. The lack of print-sound awareness leads to future reading problems and prevents students from reading often and widely; therefore, they do not reap the benefits of literacy (Moats, 2001).

Oral reading fluency refers to reading words and passages quickly, accurately, and with prosody (i.e., expression) and has been found to be a good predictor of comprehension

(Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005).

When reading becomes automatic, students can fully attend to deriving meaning from text rather than expend energy on word recognition.

Vocabulary and comprehension refers to gaining meaning from text. A few vocabulary words should be taught at a time and should be presented in multiple contexts on multiple occasions (McCormick, 2003). Comprehension instruction should help students develop such strategies as previewing, paraphrasing, reviewing, reflecting, predicting, clarifying, and summarizing as well as learn to self-monitor their understanding of text.

Principles of Effective Instruction

School administrators should be careful not to adopt the latest fad in reading instruction just because it comes attractively packaged with promised results. Instead, administrators need to ensure

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that programs, techniques, and lessons meet student needs and include the explicit teaching of critical component literacy skills along with effective teaching principles. Students will not likely master critical component skills, despite the adoption of a new program or technique, unless the following elements of effective explicit instruction are incorporated:

Modeling or demonstrating helps students learn how to read. One example of an effective modeling strategy is to ask students to listen and follow along with a passage being read aloud before they read the passage on their own (Rasinski, 1990).

Active student engagement results from structuring classrooms to allocate sufficient time for reading and providing many reading opportunities within that allocated time.

Corrective feedback involves either prompting or supplying students with the correct pronunciation of a word or

the accurate interpretation of a passage.

Scaffolding provides the necessary mediating supports—such as prompting and guided practice—and gradually fades those supports as skills are performed independently.

Shaping and reinforcement provide verbal praise that may be accompanied with tangible rewards for successive approximations of proficient reading.

Opportunities to practice encourage students to practice reading fluently by allowing them to engage in repeated oral readings of stories and passages.

In addition, reading activities should be relevant, include choices, and be incorporated into social and content-area contexts (Joseph, 2002). Most content-area teachers, however, are not familiar with the principles of effective reading instruction and will need additional training to successfully incorporate evidence-based practices into their current teaching strategies.

Evaluation and Evidence

Ongoing evaluation to determine whether instructional components are helping students become proficient readers is critical. Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) is a useful tool for identifying students who are at risk for academic difficulty, for comparing a student's performance to a normative class sample, and for monitoring the effectiveness of an ongoing intervention (Shinn, 1989). CBM detects even small changes in student performance, allowing teachers to quickly evaluate the impact of interventions and make necessary modifications. A Response-to-Intervention Three-Tiered Model (RTI) is another useful approach to evaluating the effectiveness of instruction, and it can be applied across academic domains (see Counseling 101, December 2004).

Leading the Way

School administrators play an important role in facilitating an effective reading curriculum and using curriculum-based measurement and other procedures to make effective decisions about reading instruction. As noted by Weller and Weller (1999), who examined a successful high school reading initiative in Georgia, "The most important component of this Georgia Innovative Program has been the principal's support since its inception." Specifically, principals can:

- Make reading a priority in their schools and be visible advocates for staff resources, effective practices, and student encouragement
- Assess the spectrum of reading needs within their schools' population (e.g., ELL students, weak instruction at the elementary level, high poverty rate, and so forth)
- Work with staff members to identify and secure the programs, training, and expert personnel necessary to meet the needs of their students
- Build a team approach to reading interventions that supports and empowers content-area teachers to implement

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effective reading strategies within their curricula

- Train content-area teachers in reading instruction
- Establish a data-based system for evaluating and refining the overall reading program and the instruction strategies for individual students.

Administrators also can be instrumental in coordinating communication between elementary and secondary schools regarding curriculum content and skills so students coming into secondary school are better prepared readers who are ready to take on new academic challenges. When administrators truly lead the way, effective practices will be implemented more seamlessly and consistently among educators and other stakeholders in a school system, improving outcomes for struggling readers and all students. **PL**

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