



## *Building Roads for Students' Success*

### Reflection Sheet: Instructional Strategies

#### Key Points

- Early screening at school entry and appropriate programming can prevent later reading problems in most children.
- Careful monitoring of progress and a tiered model of increasing instructional support is effective at helping struggling readers succeed.
- Subject area teachers have a role to play in supporting readers in secondary school.

Some children in Ontario classrooms struggle to acquire foundational reading skills. Some older students find reading laborious and comprehension of what they read elusive. Schools respond to these students' needs in a variety of ways, and many districts have found programs that are effective. Although no single commercial program is a "magic bullet" that alleviates all students' learning needs all of the time, research<sup>1,2,3</sup> has shown us many of the "active ingredients" that are characteristic of instructional approaches that are successful for these students.

Research tells us that prevention is more effective and less costly than remediation, so early screening for potential reading difficulties is warranted at the beginning of school. There are many reasons why children may start school behind the curve; regardless of the specific cause, early screening and programming can prevent lagging in most children that snowballs into later problems. All students have different profiles of strengths and needs; therefore, educators should consider differentiated instruction for all students according to data-derived assessment. Variables for differentiation can include time, content and the extent to which instructional activities are scaffolded by the teacher.

Excellent classroom literacy instruction is sufficient for most children to make progress in reading. Students who are learning to read respond most strongly to language arts instruction that teaches both foundational and higher-level skills concurrently. Gains are maximized for all children when both basic skills, such as phonics and phonemic awareness, and higher level skills, such as comprehension strategies, are taught.

While the majority of students respond well to systematic and explicit whole-class literacy instruction, some children will require more. Evidence suggests that these students will benefit from systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency in a small group format several times a week. Many students in this tier will respond to the greater intensity of instruction and make progress; such progress should be monitored regularly and data-derived decision rules can be utilized to determine who needs continued support at this level. There will be a smaller number of children who fail to show progress in such small group sessions; these children will require a more specific focus, slower pace and greater intensity, in daily or one-on-one sessions, in a program developed by the school-based team.

Much less is known about older readers. However, research does have several things to say about how to support and increase reading skills of adolescents. Explicit instruction in vocabulary, both direct instruction in word meaning and in strategies around how to infer meaning from context, is associated with gains in reading. Teaching students explicitly how to use a variety of comprehension strategies can increase the amount that students learn from their content textbooks. Although this may be a new idea for content area teachers, teaching the use of strategies such as graphic organizers, summarization, and question generation applied to science and history texts can yield achievement benefits. Effective instruction in comprehension strategies includes modeling and the provision of guided practice in the use of the strategies before the students are expected to use them independently. Some research also supports the idea that high-quality discussion around texts promotes understanding of complex text. The opportunity to critically analyze the author's intentions, provide alternative interpretations, and hear the views of others may help students reach a deeper level of comprehension of what they read. Relatedly, motivation to read and engagement with text are factors that are associated with increased comprehension. Establishing learning goals rather than performance goals can boost motivation and engagement; teachers can facilitate this by setting a supportive learning environment and encouraging personal challenge and maximizing autonomy in assignments involving text. Students who continue to struggle with reading as adolescents are likely to need a diagnostic reading assessment and individualized instructional plans that target specific areas of need and set personal learning goals. Specific aids in the form of advance organizers, technological supports, and graphic displays that help integrate new and familiar information can be useful.

<sup>1</sup>Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C.M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., and Tilly, W.D. (2008). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide.* (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences,

U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>.

<sup>2</sup>Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., and Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A Practice Guide (NCEE #2008-4027).* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>.

<sup>3</sup>Ontario Ministry of Education. (2005). *Education For All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6.* Queen's Printer for Ontario: Toronto, ON.

## Questions Raised

- Are school boards collecting the kind of data that will enable systematic monitoring of progress in students who struggle with reading?
- What practices, in addition to the high-yield reading strategies and tutors in the classroom currently implemented by the LNS, should be the target of future capacity-building efforts?

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