
December 2013

Do You Know What Your Elementary Literacy Program is Lacking?

Lynette Autrey

Michelle Lajiness

Janelle Magyar

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

Autrey, Lynette; Lajiness, Michelle; and Magyar, Janelle (2013) "Do You Know What Your Elementary Literacy Program is Lacking?," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol45/iss2/7>

This Bridging Research to Practice is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Do You Know What Your Elementary Literacy Program Is Lacking?

BY LYNETTE AUTREY, MICHELLE LAJINESS, & JANELLE MAGYAR

Educators involved in literacy instruction are well aware of the difficulties involved with choosing a reading program. Within our elementary reading research group, two of us teach first grade and use a basal reading series adopted by our individual school districts. The third member, a fourth-grade teacher, does not have a district-selected core reading program to guide instruction. With over 30 years of teaching experience collectively, we have all expressed frustration with not having the necessary tools in our language arts programs to support what we know are best practices, such as small group instruction, explicit vocabulary and word work, and cross-curricular reading and writing instruction. No single program includes all the elements needed for effective literacy instruction. Through our experiences as classroom teachers and as graduate students completing master's degrees as reading specialists, we have come to realize that even good programs often require supplementation. Given these experiences, we found a need to evaluate what we are currently using to teach reading and language development and determine how best to supplement our programs to give students the best footing possible in literacy learning. It is through this common understanding that we came to realize we were not alone. We felt it imperative to develop a rubric to help educators evaluate whether their programs and resources adequately supported today's standards for literacy in the elementary classroom. Many schools and districts purchased and continue to use basal reader programs using Reading First grants and other funds based on the criteria set forth by the National Reading Panel in 2000 (NICHD, 2000). These programs emphasized their alignment in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. However, they did not address other critical areas of literacy instruction. Due to the high cost of these programs, many schools and districts are still using them today, 10 or more years later, without considering what the current research says about literacy instruction. Teachers often realize something is missing from their language arts program, but may not know how to prioritize or what, specifically, is needed to fill the gaps. It may also be the case that one may not even realize the absence of an important reading concept. Through our shared research, we have discovered that the following key areas of literacy are often neglected in reading programs: guided reading, word study, and writing. The section that follows explores the importance of the aforementioned elements based on a review of current literature.

What the Research Says

Guided Reading

Guided reading provides a means by which reading goals can be explicitly modeled, coached, and practiced. During the guided reading portion of literacy instruction, teachers work with small groups of students with a common instructional goal in mind. Teachers select texts that will enable them to teach specific reading strategies, which may include phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. An essential component of guided reading is the active engagement of students with reading comprehension as the primary goal (Pinnell, & Fountas, 2010). Within the small group, the teacher introduces the strategy students will practice. Students then individually read a leveled text, selected by the teacher, to practice the strategy. While the student reads, the teacher provides adjusting feedback by modeling how to problem-solve difficult words or apply a comprehension strategy, clarifies misunderstandings the student may have, and records observational notes based on the student's performance. Guided reading enables the teacher to make instructional decisions based on the individual needs of their students, which makes differentiated instruction an obtainable classroom goal.

According to the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), guided reading with support from teachers, peers, or parents positively and significantly impacts students' word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across grade levels. As educators, we know not all students learn in the same way or have the same needs. Students within the same classroom will be at varying levels of mastery in each of the reading components,

and it is incumbent upon the teacher to identify and address these diverse learners in a way that allows them to grow in their reading independence. The effectiveness of guided reading as a method to meet those needs is supported by research that suggests it is an essential element of literacy instruction. For example, there is a strong correlation between reading fluency and comprehension (Pinnell, & Fountas, 2010). In a study that examined the effectiveness of small-group instruction for fluency, students in the fourth grade who received explicit, supported intervention showed greater gains in fluency than students who read for the same amount of time, but without structured support (Begeny, Krause, Ross, & Mitchell, 2009). Extended vocabulary instruction through guided reading also produced results in which kindergarten students scored significantly higher in vocabulary knowledge and retention than students who received only vocabulary instruction through whole-group methods (Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, 2007). Additionally, English language learners (ELL) benefitted from small-group instruction, as demonstrated in an intervention study that examined the effects of explicitly taught components of literacy such as phonics, fluency, phonemic awareness, and comprehension (Kamps, Abbott, Greenwood, & Arreaga-Mayer, 2007). Finally, students with emotional or behavioral disorders showed improved reading growth when receiving small-group instruction (Wills, Kamps, Abbott, Bannister, & Kaufman, 2010). The common thread among all these studies is the intentional planning by the teacher to provide systematic instruction, through guided reading, based on the data collected about each of the students.

Word Study

A student's ability to read, write, and spell often goes hand-in-hand. Of these three ELA concepts, traditional spelling instruction is the only one that requires a student to memorize information rather than explore, practice, and develop over time. When word study is incorporated in the classroom however, a student can improve his or her spelling skills in a way that involves *understanding* rather than memorizing. Word study is an interactive method of exploring words and word parts through a variety of instructional activities without the use of memorization (Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler & Lundstrom, 2009). Word study often works with, or is in place of, a traditional spelling program, incorporating morphology, orthography, and phonol-

ogy (Goodwin, Lipsky & Ahn, 2012). Word study is an approach to spelling that is teacher-directed but focused on students' own exploration of sounds, letters, and spelling patterns (Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler & Lundstrom, 2009). Word study includes interactive activities (known as word work) such as word sorts, word mapping, word families, word pairs, segmenting, etc. Word work is not intended to be used as a set of activities in isolation; rather, it is to be incorporated into language arts instruction and all other content areas (Goodwin, Lipsky & Ahn, 2012). Understanding and learning about words is the key to word study, as opposed to past practices of memorizing meaning and spelling.

Using word study in the classroom with an interactive writing program has been found to not only support students' spelling, but also to improve their writing development (Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler & Lundstrom, 2009). Students, even those with learning disabilities, benefit from direct instruction involving intensive word study, as reading specialist Deborah Hill Staudt (2009) discovered while tutoring two learning-disabled students using various word study methods. Even when used with middle school students, word study has been reported to have a substantial impact on student learning because of its high level of teacher involvement. When sixth-grade teacher Justin Stygles (2011) investigated the use of word study in his classroom, he found the teacher is required to work closely with the students one-on-one or small-group; therefore, educators are more likely to understand their students' specific needs and develop lessons and activities based on the development and readiness of the students. Because word study emphasizes knowing *about* words, teaching a student to break complex words into manageable, understandable morphemes leads to better comprehension of a word's meaning and ultimately, the text as a whole (Goodwin, Lipsky & Ahn, 2012). A meta-analysis of morphological interventions found that reading interventions for struggling readers involving components of word study resulted in improved reading, spelling, and vocabulary comprehension (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010). In a 2009 study by Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler and Lundstrom, participants ranged from kindergarten to second grade and included general education and Title One students. The researchers used a variety of word study approaches in a variety of school settings and found word study to be an

essential part of reading instruction. There is much research to support the value of using word study combined with word work in the classroom to improve students' overall reading and writing abilities.

Writing

According to the College Board (2003), our country once believed that K-12 public education stood on the pillars of saying things in correct grammar, saying things articulately, and saying things in a well-organized and meaningful way. Even as much as 10 years ago, it became evident that a shift in focus has occurred within our nation's classrooms. According to the National Writing Commission (NCW) in America's Schools and Colleges, writing had already become the neglected "R" in the year 2002. The commission went on to say that the three pillars of writing should still remain a primary focus for our nation. It was their recommendation to double the amount of writing time in our nation's schools, at a minimum.

In the same year, the Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates reported that nearly 1 in 5 college students required a remedial writing class and more than half of the newly accepted college students had difficulty writing a paper relatively free of errors (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2002). In 2004, The NCW published the results of a study conducted of American business corporations affiliated with the Business Roundtable. These businesses employed nearly 8 million people collectively at the time of the study. Their findings reported that these business firms may spend as much as \$3.1 billion annually to support writing remediation of their employees. This suggests that our nation's children are not as well prepared for future employment as was once thought. The study findings also report that writing quality is a primary factor in gaining interviews, achieving employment and gaining promotions among salaried employees.

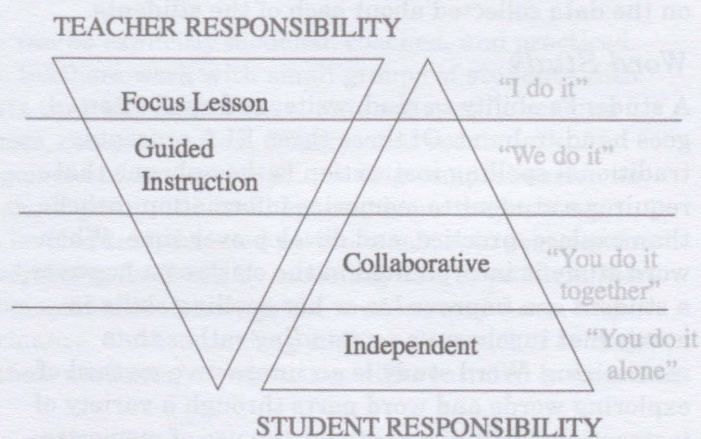
So what can we do, as a nation, to better prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs? Research shows that the drill and practice model of teaching English grammar using worksheets for diagramming and circling certain word-types is ineffective. While students may be able to identify a noun or verb in a pre-made sentence, it doesn't necessarily translate into their own writing experiences. Students need opportunities to model their writing after other successful authors. They need to not only learn the process of writing, but the characteristics or traits of quality writing. The use of "mentor texts," books or articles written by

exemplary authors, as opposed to contrived sentences for circling and diagramming, offer students an opportunity to practice their writing with quality in mind. Students need to be taught the traits of writing explicitly and given ample opportunities to practice with the guidance of a skilled educator or writing coach. The Northwest Educational Regional Lab offers a resource listing of writing characteristics that are widely accepted as the standards for quality writing. These traits include: idea and content, organization, author's voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and writing conventions (grammar and punctuation). Sometimes presentation is added as a consideration in the "quality" of one's writing (known as 6 traits +1). There is more than one method for teaching these characteristics of writing. However, as educators, we know that the gradual release of responsibility model, developed by Pearson & Gallagher (1983), has been shown to be an effective model for improving writing achievement (see figure 1) (Fisher & Frey, 2003). It is, therefore, recommended that any literacy program being considered instruct students on the six traits of writing, preferably using a gradual release of responsibility model for instruction. If your program does not include the gradual release of responsibility in its lesson plans, it could still be implemented using the core content from your current program.

Responding to the Research

In response to the research, we created a user-

Figure 1
A Structure for Instruction that Works



A Structure for Instruction that Works

(c) Fisher & Frey, 2006

© Fusger & Frey, 2006

friendly rubric to evaluate current and potential literacy programs. The following rubric aligns with

our research data and identifies key areas lacking in some literacy programs. This will assist educators

Table 1
Elementary Literacy Evaluation Rubric

<i>Alphabetic</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Does this program contain explicit phonemic awareness instruction (hearing and manipulating sounds in words through substitution, blending, deletion, segmentation, and rhyming)?</i>		
<i>Does this program contain systematic phonics instruction (letter/sound relationships to read and spell words)?</i>		
<i>Notes:</i>		
<i>Word Study</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Does this program contain word study lessons that involve phonology, orthography, and morphology?</i>		
<i>Does this program contain a variety of word work activities such as word sorts, word hunts, word families, and segmenting?</i>		
<i>Does this program provide multiple assessment tools to assess students' word knowledge?</i>		
<i>Does this program allow for differentiation of word study instruction?</i>		
<i>Does this program take into consideration the amount of time that is needed to work with students in a small group setting?</i>		
<i>Does this program give students opportunities to engage in "real world" writing experiences to incorporate their learning of word knowledge across the curriculum?</i>		
<i>Is this program's word study component implemented across grade levels?</i>		
<i>Notes:</i>		
<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Does this program teach vocabulary directly (introduced prior to reading)?</i>		
<i>Does this program teach vocabulary indirectly (using context clues during reading)?</i>		

(Table continues on page 30)

<i>Are students given repeated exposure to vocabulary through a variety of means (pictures, realia, and computer technology)?</i>		
<i>Notes:</i>		
Comprehension	Yes	No
<i>Does this program explicitly teach comprehension strategies good readers use including:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Activating background knowledge</i> • <i>Predicting</i> • <i>Making Connections</i> • <i>Visualizing</i> • <i>Summarizing</i> • <i>Synthesizing</i> • <i>Retelling</i> • <i>Inferring</i> 		
<i>Notes:</i>		
Writing	Yes	No
<i>Does the program require students to write daily?</i>		
<i>Are mentor texts being used as a model for writing?</i>		
<i>Does the program support explicit instruction of the 6 traits of writing?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Contents/Ideas</i> • <i>Organization</i> • <i>Vocabulary/Word Choice</i> • <i>Voice</i> • <i>Sentence Fluency</i> • <i>Conventions</i> 		
<i>Are students held accountable for the traits of writing that have been modeled and coached at the point of submission (i.e., writing traits rubric)?</i>		
<i>Are writing opportunities offered for students to revisit the text in different ways, extend their understanding, and apply phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension skills?</i>		
<i>Does the program expect students to use taught vocabulary in their writing?</i>		
<i>Does the lesson plan framework account for a gradual release of responsibility to the student?</i>		
<i>Notes:</i>		
Guided Reading	Yes	No
<i>Are small groups formed based on formative and summative assessments?</i>		
<i>Are small groups flexible, skill-based, and temporary?</i>		

<i>Is small-group instruction focused on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, and word study?</i>		
<i>Is there a wide range of highly engaging, leveled texts encompassing a variety of genres to maintain student interest and support their progress?</i>		
<i>Does this program contain guided, repeated oral reading of texts to support accuracy, pace, and expression?</i>		
<i>Is the conversation designed to develop deeper-thinking skills?</i>		
<i>Is there time for independent reading, outside of the small-group instruction, where students can reread, practice newly learned skills, and transfer those skills to new texts?</i>		
<i>Is guided reading instruction structured to motivate students by allowing them to be successful and engaging them in meaningful conversation?</i>		
Notes:		

and administrators involved in literacy instruction to recognize at a glance what the program being considered includes, as well as areas needed for supplementation.

In Conclusion

Through our research we found there were several overlapping concepts that wove the various missing components together. For example, the research shows small group instruction (guided reading) is beneficial in teaching word study, vocabulary, and writing in addition to comprehension and decoding skills. Word study and increased vocabulary supported writing through superior word choice, sentence fluency, and writing conventions. One factor that continually surfaced throughout our study, was teaching needed to be explicit and intentional, with instructional decisions based on assessment data.

All three of the authors hold master's degrees in reading from Madonna University and have experience leading a reading clinic and writing tutoring through an after-school program with elementary school children in Detroit.

Lynette Autrey is a fourth-grade teacher for Howell Public Schools. In this issue of MRJ you will also find Lynette's reviews of children's books in the Cabbages and Kings column, to which she is a regular contributor.

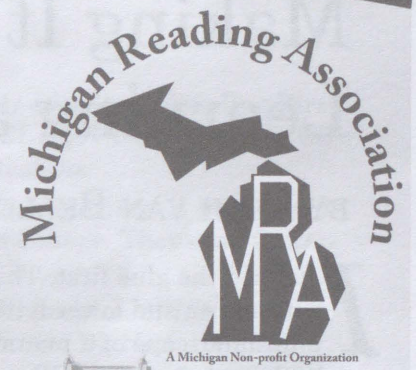
Michelle Lajiness teaches at Warren Woods Christian School in Warren, MI.

Janelle Magyar is the K-2 Dean at Canton Charter Academy located in Canton, MI, where she was previously a classroom teacher.

References

- Akerson, V., & Young, T. (2005). Science the write way. *Science and Children*, 43(3), 38-41.
- Aphorp, H. (2006). Effects of a supplemental vocabulary program in third grade reading/language arts. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(2), 67-80.
- Begeny, J.C., Krause H.E., Ross, S.G., & Mitchell, R.C. (2009). Increasing elementary-aged students' reading fluency with small group interventions: A comparison of repeated readings, listening passage preview, and listening only strategies. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 18(3), 211-228.
- College Board, the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, School, and Colleges. (2003, April). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York: Author.
- College Board, the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, School, and Colleges. (2004, September). *Writing: A ticket to work... or a ticket out: A survey of business leaders*. New York: Author.

- Coyne, M.D., McCoach, D.B., & Kapp, S. (2007). Vocabulary intervention for kindergarten students: Comparing extended instruction to embedded instruction and incidental instruction. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 30(2), 74-88.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2003). Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 46, 396-407.
- Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2006). *Language arts workshop: Purposeful reading and writing instruction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Education.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goodwin, A., Lipsky, M., & Ahn, S. (2012). Word detectives: Using units of meaning to support literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(7), 461-470.
- Goodwin, A.P., & Ahn, S. (2010). A meta-analysis of morphological interventions: Effects on literacy achievement of children with literacy difficulties. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 60(2), 183-208.
- Harris, K., Graham, S., & Mason, L. (2006). Improving the writing, knowledge, and motivation of struggling young writers: Effects of self-regulated strategy development with and without peer support. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43, 295-337.
- Iaquinta, A. (2006). Guided reading: A research-based response to the challenges of early reading instruction. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*, 33(6), 413-418.
- Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. (2002, Spring). *Academic literacy: A statement of competencies expected of students entering California's public colleges and universities*. Sacramento: Author.
- Kamps, D., Abbott, M., Greenwood C., & Arreaga-Mayer, C. (2007). Use of evidence-based, small-group reading instruction for English language learners in elementary grades: Secondary-tier intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 30(3), 153-168.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Pearson, P. D., & Gallagher, M. C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8, 317-344.
- Pinnell, G.S., & Fountas, I.C. (2010). *Guided reading program: A research base for guided reading as an instructional approach*. New York: Scholastic.
- Rogers, L., & Graham, S. (2008). A meta-analysis of single subject design writing intervention research. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(4), 879-906.
- Staudt, D.H. (2009). Intensive word study and repeated reading improves reading skills for two students with learning disabilities. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(2), 142-151.
- Stygles, J. (2011). Implementing morphological word study in the intermediate classroom. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 46(2), 60-67.
- William, C., & Lundstrom, R. (2007). Strategy instruction during word study and interactive writing activities. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(3), 204-212.
- Williams, C., Phillips-Birdsong, C., Hufnagel, K., & Lundstorm, R.P. (2009). Word study instruction in the k-2 classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(7), 570-578.
- Wills, H., Kamps, D., Abbott, M., Bannister, H., & Kaufman, J. (2010). Classroom observations and effects of reading interventions for students at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Behavioral Disorders*, 36(2), 103-119.



Border Crossings: Bridging Legacies and Innovation through Literacy

**SAVE THE
DATE!**

Michigan Reading Association **Summer Literature Conference**

Dates: July 9-10, 2013

Location: Mackinac Island, Mission Point Resort • www.missionpoint.com

**Featured Speakers: Dr. Kylene Beers • Dr. Terry M. Blackhawk
Dr. Patricia Edwards • Dr. Teri Lesesne • Dr. Robert Probst**

**Featured Authors: Denise Brennan-Nelson • Deborah Diesen • Bena Hartman
Carol McCloud • Janie Lynn Panagopoulos • Gijsbert & Robbyn Van Frankenhuyzen**

To register, visit: [www. http://michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org)

Photo courtesy of: www.mightymac.org