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# Effectiveness of Instructional Strategies to Enhance the Reading Achievement of At-Risk Students

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# Effectiveness of Instructional Strategies

# to Enhance the Reading Achievement of

# At-Risk Students

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Research on reading since the 1980s... is very helpful in specifying the kinds of knowledge and skill that children must have to be good readers, but it does not necessarily tell us directly how teachers should work with children to help them acquire this necessary knowledge and skill.

--Joseph K. Torgensen (2004, 355)


[The field of reading research is] large, uneven, and intractable... [w]e still do not know what types of instruction are suitable for different ages and populations of children... .We do not even know whether the existing body of research can answer those questions.

--Joanne Yatvin (2000, 2, 3)


The quotations above may appear discouraging to educators who are looking for definitive answers regarding effective reading instruction and effective reading instruction for children at risk. Certainly researchers and teachers are in agreement regarding the components that are needed to read successfully and have a good idea of the skills that proficient readers consistently use. When children or older students are not able to read well or fluently or to comprehend their reading, the specific intervention strategies— and their duration and intensity— to bring those readers up to skill level remains an area of serious debate. This report will attempt to provide some background regarding that controversy and to look at selected recent research and its implications.

**The Reading Wars**

The recent tumult in the area of reading has been referred to by some as the reading "wars," and the war has been waged for about twenty years. It is both philosophical and ideological and, as reading scholar Denny Taylor wryly remarks, "politics doesn't stop at the schoolhouse door" (1999, 218). Indeed, it would be hard to overestimate the divisiveness and rancor in the scholarly reading community. While there has always been argument regarding the approaches to teaching reading— notably, in the recent past, holistic, meaning-centered approaches vs. skills instruction— the controversy reached a new apex in late 2000 with the commission of and publication of the Report of the National Reading Panel. The U.S. Congress commissioned the work of this panel; the interest and influence of legislators and the president was evident. A small group of reading scholars was selected and was expected, in a very short time, to examine extant research, digest it, and come up with consensus suggestions for the teaching of reading. The hope was that the findings of the Panel would put to rest, finally, the controversy and the contradictory messages that many educators had received regarding the teaching of reading and would provide direction and focus. For instance, some of the debate in scholarly reading circles has involved the emphasis on word recognition vs. phonetic attack, on systematic skills instruction vs. what is generally known as Whole Language, and on use of controlled-vocabulary basal readers vs. authentic, intact texts. These opposing camps represent, in the main, conservative vs. liberal views of education, and, in many cases, compromise between the two has been seen as impossible. But as might be expected, these controversies have not been put to rest, and the National Reading Panel has not, to date, won over the entire reading community.

**The National Reading Panel and the Reading Community**

Despite the high hopes in the educational world for the report of the National Reading

Panel, it became less of a cohesive, consensus document than one that fully illustrated current tensions. First and foremost, while the Panel could have used in its work literally thousands of research studies on the teaching of reading, it confined itself to a few hundred, the few hundred being labeled as **replicable, scientifically-based research**. This definition of acceptable reading research narrowed the discussion remarkably, as many studies were not designed to be either replicable or, at least as the Panel defined it, scientifically-based. This issue highlights again the difficulties in the area of reading: Much of reading research, involving the lives of children and conducted in the context of their school environment, does not involve control groups, and many of the articles on the teaching of reading are anecdotal accounts of individual students and their classrooms. While some have intensified the debate by terming such anecdotal evidence as "folklore" (Vaughn and Linan-Thompson 2004, 5), researchers who have worked with children and in classrooms often do not agree. Indeed, as Jack M. Fletcher and David J. Francis (2004) note:

> *empirical*... the attempt to systematically collect observations that can be verified, replicated, and otherwise scrutinized [is not always applicable to certain] academic disciplines, such as history, or other areas of human inquiry... because many of the methods of observation cannot be consistently verified, refuted, or other scrutinized. (63)

No studies that were not considered scientifically-based or replicable were included in the Report of the National Reading Panel, and for some critics, notably more liberal educators, this was a serious deficiency. In addition, the Panel's neglect of the connection between reading and writing and the entire Whole Language movement were also seen as oversights (McCracken 2004).

As another point, the composition of the scholarly group selected to serve on the Panel

was not as widely based as some might hope. Almost half of the seventeen members were scholars whose specialty field was lower-order reading skills. Not surprising to some observers those lower-order skills were the focus of the Panel's findings (Pressley 2001, 5). The concern was that a total concentration on specific skills would leave larger issues unexplored. As reading scholar Michael Pressley (2001) comments:

> Effective reading instruction occurs over years and changes with the developmental level of the child... these dynamics [are] not captured at all by the Panel's emphases on discrete skills appropriate at only particular developmental levels. (3)

As a corollary to the above concentration on discrete lower-order skills, the Panel's majority conclusion regarding strategies that enhanced reading skills seemed to be targeted to individual strategies more than to the teaching of the entire process of reading. It was not surprising, then, that the Panel focused on specific commercially prepared reading programs, highlighting a handful of which would accomplish what the Panel seemed to indicate was beneficial to reading instruction.

All of these concerns were reflected in a minority report of the Reading Panel, written by Panel member Joanne Yatvin (2000) and published at the end of the original document. Yatvin's piece garnered much attention in the reading community and seemed to indicate that the field would, once again, remain divided between those who looked at explicit direct instruction of skills and subset skills and those who worked with broad literacy practices in which they believed many of these skills were incorporated and contained. Yatvin maintained:

> In the end, the work of the NRP is not of poor quality; it is just unbalanced and, to some extent, irrelevant... In spite of the Panel's diligent efforts and its valuable findings on a select number of instructional practices, we still cannot answer the first and most central question of the charge: "What is known about the basic processes by which

children learn to read." We still do not know what types of instruction are suitable for different ages and populations of children... We do not even know whether the existing body of research can answer those questions. (3)

Four years later, the influence of the National Reading Panel deliberations is clear, but, once again, scholars in the reading community remain divided, and, therefore, the research presented here will fall into distinct and occasionally contradictory camps.

**What Is Reading Skill?**

While this question may seem self-evident, it is also part of the controversy in the reading research community. For researchers such as P. David Pearson, reading is child- or student-centered, and involves essentially constructivism, the making of meaning within a context that is recognizable to the reader (1992, 1075). Reading is not, thus, a "single, one-step act" (NCTE 2004, 4). When readers have difficulty with a text, they become strategic and can use a toolbox of strategies to improve comprehension. This kind of image of a "fix up" procedure, which depends heavily on contextualized reading and on the reader as an active constructor, is different from the picture presented by the National Reading Panel.

In contradistinction to the above, the Report of the National Reading Panel cited three marks of reading skill: **alphabetics** (the principle that letters in words represent sounds, requiring for all readers the ability to decode words, notably through phonics and phonemic awareness); **fluency** (being able to read quickly and accurately, using appropriate stress and cadence); and **comprehension** (understanding what is read). The first of these is one of the most hotly contested areas of reading research, while the second two are not quite as divisive.

For one camp in the reading community, **phonemic awareness** is directly related to successful early reading (Taylor 1999, 217). If reading difficulties are obvious, phonemic awareness work is central, and "explicit training in phonemic awareness is the key to reading

success" (218). For some researchers "phonics instruction is one ingredient of a successful reading program," and objections to such should not be "threatening" (Ehri and Stahl 2001, 17). For others, however, such as researcher Elaine M. Garan, the findings of the National Reading Panel in the area of phonics and at-risk students are inaccurate and misleading (Garan 2001), and therefore uncritical belief in direct phonics instruction must be tempered. Indeed, if "reading is more than decoding the sounds that letters and groups of letters represent, or even of reading words" (Taylor 1999, 218), then the direct instruction of phonics is not the sine qua non to increased reading skill. Beyond the issue, however, lies also the interpretation of the studies that purport to show the centrality of phonemic awareness. Keith Stanovich's (1986) "Matthew Effects in Reading" is one such widely cited study, but scholars such as Taylor (1999) contend that Stanovich has distorted the research findings beyond acceptable boundaries.

Fluency, which is difficult to remediate (see discussion following) is the ability to read beyond the word level, and to connect text quickly, smoothly, and automatically. Clearly, its presence is an indicator of reading skill. Finally, comprehension is the ability to draw meaning from text, not simply to decode the words or even read them with skill. These two, fluency and comprehension, are often more serious issues for older readers who are struggling (while certainly some older struggling readers can also be at the beginning stage and have problems with decoding and phonemic awareness). Decoding and phonemic awareness are more frequent issues for beginning readers.

Beyond reading skill itself, one of the aspects that is important for educators to consider is what indeed constitutes a valid measure of reading skill. In our current test-driven education environment, it may seem a luxury to ask this question, but all researchers are not convinced that scores on certain reading tests actually indicate reading skill. "Measuring the success of a reading program only by test scores" (NCTE 2004, 4) can be highly misleading. The classic

assessment components of reliability, validity, objectivity, and even utility are important here: short-term test gains, for instance, may not yield long term behavior changes (i.e., students who, beyond the test itself, want to read and use reading regularly) or result in consistent comprehension gains (Pearson 1992, 1084). One such study from Ake Olofsson and Ingvar Lundberg (1985), for instance, notes that when children "participated in the phonemic training program... they improved their scores on phonemic synthesis tests in school," a finding which is virtually useless when one considers long-term reading improvement. Another study of the reading skills of nine second- and third-grade children with mild disabilities showed that use of phonological strategies over twelve weeks did indeed help students blend words and pronounce words (Boyle and Walker-Siebert 1997). While this is interesting, it does not address the complexity of reading which is, as noted above, more than the mastery of discrete skills.

**Reading and Reading Skills, K-3 Vs. Older Readers**

There is virtually unanimity in the reading research community that students who are poor readers in first grade will be so in later years. The probability from grade 2 to grade 4 is above .80 (Pearson 1992, 1081). Again, for younger students, the major issue is decoding, and reading prevention for younger students is seen as preferable to remediation.

For older students, post-grade 3, reading moves into more of the area of comprehension and fluency, and the focus is **academic literacy**. Certainly while older students may be defined as poor readers when confronted with that kind of material, it is also true that many students read other texts widely and read in other ways than those sanctioned in school (NCTE 2004, 1). Indeed, the issue is complicated for older students: adolescent literacy is complex, and the possibilities of different kinds of readers (**dormant readers** who read only for pleasure when they feel they have enough time; **uncommitted readers** who may grow to like reading but who do not appear to care for reading initially; and **unmotivated readers** who

actively dislike reading; Beers and Samuels 1998) intensify the problems. While some might

assume **illiteracy** is the problem, **aliteracy** is often a more accurate description. This is

particularly salient with males, who may eagerly read "non privileged forms" of text which are

related to their interests, but not necessarily academic work (Love and Hamiston 2003). Older

students who can read but prefer not to are of deep concern to educators.

## Defining Reading Components and Thus Defining the Debate

### Decoding

While phonemic awareness is necessary to decode, it is not a sufficient condition for

reading comprehension (Pearson 1992, 1081). On the other hand, poorer readers must work

hard on word identification as context— something proficient readers understand— is not

strong for poorer readers (Pearson 1992, 1078). In fact, the oral reading miscues of better

readers are more contextually appropriate than those of poorer readers who may articulate a

word which is wildly inappropriate in context (Pearson 1992, 1077). One confounding aspect,

however, is the concern about phonics knowledge and phonemic awareness. If indeed the two

are the cause of reading skill and success, it would be clear that direct instruction should be

mandated. On the other hand, as Pearson (1992, 1082) and others contend, could it be possible

that phonics knowledge and phonemic awareness are a consequence of reading skill and

success? If such is true, then direct instruction, certainly in isolation, may not be as compelling

as might be assumed. Regardless, the point is that children who learn these skills must apply

them directly into contextual reading.

A recent study of 200 children (charted from preschool through first grade) from low-

income backgrounds revealed that when children learned to sound out a word in context and

"anchored" that word to meaning, a stronger connection between printed word and meaning

was established (Bucuvalas and Juel 2002). Accordingly, while letter-sound instruction is

important, Juel cautions that competent readers become so when the words they sound out are connected to context.

Although the work of Marilyn Adams (1990) does not support the following, an intriguing study by Eric J. Paulson and Anne E. Freeman (2003) indicates that readers' eye movements show that they do not "attend to every letter of every word in a text in a quite linear, left-to-right way" (viii) but read in a more irregular nature, looking more for meaning than individual words (87). This research tends to support constructivist, holistic views of reading rather than what Adams and others contend is a reader's individual attention to sounds and thus increased attention to discrete skills.

### Comprehension

Improvement of comprehension is based on the structure of the text or knowledge, the text and background knowledge, and student monitoring of reading (Pearson 1992, 1080). Much work in this area deals with teacher preparation of students, activation of background knowledge, student reflection on what has been read, and, finally, interest of text itself. Comprehension is vitally important for school success with older students, and the Afterword in **Appendix A.** offers some suggestions for classroom teaching.

### Fluency

It appears that this component of reading is one of the most difficult to remediate; while accuracy and comprehension can be improved with intervention, fluency is more elusive (Torgesen 2004, 373). Fluency includes accuracy in decoding, automaticity in word recognition, and the appropriate use of stress and text phrasing (Kuhn and Stahl 2000, 5). One reason that the remediation of fluency is difficult may be that fluency increases with reading, and when a student is a weak reader to begin with, more reading (in particular for outside-of-school projects) is not a usual choice. In addition, for older readers, vocabulary gets more complex

from third grade on, and reading problems which may have been mild in earlier grades become compounded as sight vocabulary is insufficient to mange increased complexity (Torgesen 2004, 375, 376). Just more reading in and of itself may not help fluency; repeated reading of a similar text is an often-used strategy and may also affect accuracy of word attack (Torgesen 2004, 377). Accordingly, the two major remediation techniques for developing fluency are repeated readings and assisted reading (Kuhn and Stahl 2000, 1).

## The At-Risk Student

For the purposes of this report, while the broad designation of at risk (most often indicated by SES and that determined by the use of free or reduced price lunch in school) is clear, this report will narrow the definition into **at risk for reading** which is independent of SES. It is important to caution against a deficit model assumption (i.e., believing that students with low SES are naturally, always deficient in language or academic skills). Many students who live in low-income settings do well in school, and homes that are not print dense can have an oral culture that is sophisticated and rich. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the intersection of general at risk and reading at risk is high. Pearson in particular emphasizes the high correlations between SES and average student reading achievement (1992, 1080). Indeed, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2004), NCES, notes that achievement gains in reading are smaller at the K-3 level if the family exhibits four risk factors:

- A household income below the poverty level;

- Non-English as the primary home language;

- A mother with less than a high school diploma or with a GED degree;

- A single parent household.

According to the NCES (2004, 48), as the number of these factors increase, the smaller the gains in reading. Additionally, some of these findings are confirmed by the 2003 National

Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP, which found that the presence of books in the home and parents with an eighth-grade education were associated positively with higher reading scores on the NAEP assessment. As a final factor, NCES notes that African American students' achievement gains are always less than other minorities and Caucasians. Despite these observations, this report will concentrate on students who are at risk for reading, not necessarily students with low SES or having the family characteristics cited above.

Students who are at risk for reading have a significant delay in a broad range of pre-reading skills, including oral language knowledge that supports reading comprehension and in print knowledge required to read words (Torgesen 2004, 356). For these students, instructional interventions are necessary, and while there is real debate regarding what intervention is appropriate (such as the need for direct, explicit phonics instruction [Torgesen 2004, 357]), interventions are called for.

**What Selected Recent Research Tells Us**

Garcia, Pearson and Jimenez (as cited in Pearson 1992) caution against at-risk reading programs which could tend to actually stifle reading development. These programs were characterized by:

- Heavy dose of phonics

- Little print awareness

- Differentiated instruction that emphasizes the basics only.

For these researchers, there was an *"extra help conspiracy "* (Pearson 1992, 1080) that meant that the students were pulled out of the regular classrooms but did not necessarily increase their skills.

Researcher Judith Langer (2002) looked at 25 schools, 44 teachers, and 86 classes and focused on students who did well on high-stakes tests. She found that teachers used a variety of

approaches to increase reading skills and test performance, approaches that were integrated into the curriculum and not presented as discrete skills.

While many reading proponents do not consider the issues of motivation, assigning them to Whole Language concerns (and thus discrediting them), for older readers motivation is key (Torgesen 2004, 340). Motivation may be affected by a choice of reading text although students for whom the authority of the teacher is more culturally important will not be as affected by choice. Nevertheless, motivation can be increased by attention to selecting interesting texts and by giving students the opportunity to collaborate with the text and understand the content goals of the text (Torgesen 2004, 340 ff.).

Beyond the establishment of Reading First, part of NCLB legislation, another legacy of the National Reading Panel is a devotion to the phrase "what works" and while the term may seem very appealing, it can also be misleading. For some proponents of the Panel's findings, interventions to improve reading are restricted to supplemental reading programs, products such as basals and texts, practices such as reading aloud and work with home literacy, and mainstreaming of students (What Works, 2004). While this list seems precise, it can also deflect attention from the subtleties of the argument, particularly when specific programs are advocated to improve discrete skills.

**The At-Risk Student and Increased Reading Achievement**

There appears to be consensus that all students at all levels of reading skill can benefit from reading instruction. For at-risk students, however, the instruction needs to be both more explicit in skills and more intensive (Torgesen 2004, 363). Citing a number of studies, Torgesen notes that increased reading skill can be achieved by increasing **instructional time** or by using **small group instruction**; most of the studies seem to confirm that **one-to- one instruction** is no more effective than small group work (Torgesen 2004, 364). As for what constitutes

**intensive,** 60 hours of intervention "closed the gap" for mild reading impairments (Torgesen 2004, 370) and for moderate reading impairments, 50 to 100 hours of small group work. The gains from approximately 67 to 133 hours of one-to-one instruction improved reading skills and, further, the gains were maintained for two years (Torgesen 2004, 371).

### K-3

The benchmark of the 30th percentile is cited by researchers regarding critical word reading skills. K-3 students who are below that percentile are appropriate targets for intervention (Torgesen 2004, 366). Most researchers agree that young students are more amenable to skills improvement. One reason may be that younger students believe that that ability, task difficulty, and luck are not as important as effort, a characteristic that is under their personal control. As students grow older, they explain school success (and failure) by ability, not effort, and they can lose enthusiasm about reading work (Pressley 2002, 293-294).

### Older Students

Recent studies confirm that older students can improve reading skills with explicit, systematic, and intensive interventions (Torgesen 2004, 369). Students who have weak reading skills and have not received good instruction will show enhanced gains as opposed to those weak readers who also receive strong instruction; the gains of the latter group will be lower (Torgesen 2004, 372). As school becomes more difficult and competitive, many students with poor reading skills will fall further behind (Pressley 2002, 302).

As mentioned before, for older students in particular, the content of the reading needs to be of interest, and readers need significant time to interact with text (such as in SSR or Sustained Silent Reading). While SSR is not often a hallmark of middle or senior high schools, Robert J. Marzano (2004) advocates it far beyond the elementary school. To enhance reading skills, Marzano suggests five steps, many of which are student-centered and student-directed

and many of which are also advocated by other reading researchers (see Pearson 1992, 1080 ff.; NCTE 2004):

- Students identify topics of interest to them;

- Students identify reading material;

- Students are provided uninterrupted time to read;

- Students write about or represent information in their notebooks (see also Afterword, Appendix A.);

- Students interact with the information. (46-61)

As the International Reading Association position statement on adolescent literacy notes, "the literacy needs of the adolescent reader are far different from those of primary–grade children" (Moore et al. 1999,1),  and difficulties and differences can increase as children become older.

Beyond skills instruction, students can also benefit from family literacy, instruction at home, use of community resources such as tutors, and a serious reconsideration of time spent with television (Pressley 2001, 12) and computer games. The International Reading Association also underscores these needs, and cites families, community, and national need for support to increase skills (Moore et al. 1999, 9).

**Recommendations for the At-Risk Students and Reading Achievement**

**Preventive**

Preventive studies are largely confined to kindergarten and grade one (Torgesen 1999, 359) and are often touted because of the overwhelming "negative consequences of true reading failure such as loss of motivation and interest in reading" and therefore less time spent reading and a restricted vocabulary (Torgesen 2004, 361). Certainly early education programs such as Head Start (Luce and Thompson 2005; Pressley 2001, 16) are beneficial to all children, especially those at risk.

### Remedial or Intervention

Remedial work with students is initiated after the child exhibits clear difficulties. While "intervention research has not yet discovered the conditions that need to be in place for *all* children with the most serious disabilities to acquire adequate world-level reading skills in elementary school," research does show how to "sharply reduce the number of children" (Torgesen 2004, 367). Again, explicit, systematic, and intensive interventions (Torgesen 2004, 369) seem to be beneficial. For instance, Iverson and Trimmer found that an addition of five minutes of explicit phonics instruction to a Reading Recovery program yielded a 30% gain in scores. (Torgesen 2004, 359) In addition, a recent study of 165 low-achieving students in twelve elementary schools in Montgomery County, Virginia confirmed the "efficacy of Reading Recovery as an early intervention" (Feret 2001, ii). For these researchers, who support commercial reading programs, programs such as Success for All have "reliable and substantial evidence" of success for at-risk students (Torgesen 2004, 362).

In fact, one study for 122 reading disabled children compared the programs for students in lower grades (second, third, and fourth) to those in fifth and sixth grades and found that "children at each grade level made equivalent gains with remediation," underscoring the contention that older students are not susceptible to remediation is false (Lovett and Steinbach 1997). The researchers conclude that "the first core deficit associated with developmental reading disability, that of phonological awareness, is amenable to focused and intensive remedial effort, and that this effort is well directed across the elementary school years" (208).

Another confounding issue, however, is that effective reading instruction can change significantly for students as they age: developmental levels and changes in reading ability can mean that interventions must be adjusted (Pressley 2001, 15). For Researcher Michael Pressley, the "entire complicated processing that sophisticated readers employ when they read

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challenging texts" (2001, 8-9) is not captured by the support for teaching individual strategies.

From a more global perspective, students with low SES whose reading achievement is strong are often in schools where reading programs are contextualized, and strong school leadership consistently emphasizes the importance of reading (Pearson 1992, 1080). A shared vision for schools and a respect for teachers as professionals was also evident (Langer 2001), findings which are consistent with an analysis of 61 schools in Virginia and their students' performance on SOL tests (Christie 2004).

Finally, despite the controversy regarding which program and which set of skills, it appears that researchers agree that at-risk students need explicit and intensive instruction--while the range of activities and mix of activities may vary (Torgesen 2004, 363). In addition, this intervention must be monitored and must be ongoing.

## Conclusion

For at-risk students, it appears that a variety of interventions is appropriate as is the necessity of ongoing support. While short-term interventions may result in spikes in reading achievement test scores (Pearson 1992, 1083), especially of at-risk students (Pressley 2002,.210), they do not appear to carry the child far beyond the immediate measure. Accordingly, intervention must be maintained. Children who have reading difficulties in early education will continue to have difficulties, and they need intervention that is sustained. Skills instruction is necessary but not incompatible with the tenets of Whole Language. While "just reading" is often not enough (Pressley 2002, 349), "just reading" will help vocabulary and comprehension (Lause 2004, 25; Pearson 1992, 1081). In addition, a serious monitoring of a student's reading skill is important; a reader's needs will change over time, and the change needs to be assessed and attended to (Pressley 2001, 15). In essence, as Pressley notes, "long-term cure is long-term cognitive intervention that is always changing to match the developmentally increasing

demands" of reading (2001, 15).

## Recommendations

- Prevention of reading difficulties is optimal

- Intervention for reading difficulties, once detected, should begin immediately

- Intervention must be monitored and sustained as the student may well exhibit a shifting set of needs and skills

- Reading test scores should be put into context as they may not measure the complexity of reading or the success of a reading program


**Schools** where students succeed and are strong readers are characterized by:

- Strong leadership

- High expectations

- Safe environment for children

- Top priority is student acquisition of basic school skills

- Monitoring of student progress (Pressley 2002, 210; Christie 2004)

- A shared vision of school goals for curriculum and instruction

- Coordinated curriculum

- The use of variety of approaches to instruction

- An attitude towards teachers as knowledgeable professionals (Langer 2001)

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    *Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading*

    *and Its Implications for Reading Instruction. Reports of the Subgroups.* Washington, DC:

    National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (NIH Pub. No. 00-4754)

# Appendix

**A. From the Afterword by Leila Christenbury to *High School Reading Instruction*,**

**Bonnie Ericson, ed., 2001, Urbana, IL: NCTE.**

## Afterword: The Future of Reading in High School

Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996) provides insight into

that most powerful of human activities, an activity that Manguel notes began around 4,000 B.C.

with the inscription on a clay tablet of ten goats and sheep. Since that time, reading has

expanded exponentially across the world, and while Manguel notes that today about a quarter of

the world's population cannot read, *just* recently almost 360,000 books were added in a single

year to the Library of Congress' current 100 million-item collection. Beyond the facts and

figures and dates, however, *A History of Reading* acutely observes the social and psychological

aspects of reading:

> In every literate society, learning to read is something of an initiation, a ritualized
> passage out of a state of dependency and rudimentary communication. The child
> learning to read is admitted into the communal memory by way of books, and thereby
> becomes acquainted with a common past which he or she renews, to a greater or lesser
> degree, in every reading. (71)

This link to a shared past, this membership in a community memory is certainly central

to the power and pleasure of being a reader. And for me, although I may be optimistic, I see the

future of reading as a bright one. I can barely find a space for my car in the parking lots of my

city's mega bookstores--and it is my impression that not everyone inside those buildings is not

just sipping double decaf lattes and shopping for alternative rock CDs. I see in those

bookstores serious buying and reading going on, and when folks leave the buildings, they leave with bags of books and magazines in hand.

In my personal life, I also find I am regularly asked by friends and acquaintances about book recommendations, and not all of those who ask are teachers or academics. Many of my friends work outside the schools— one, for instance, works in a printing plant, one is a master welder, and one is a graphic designer--and all three in the past few months have asked me for titles of good books to read. It seems that more folks than just English teachers are going to bed not with the remote control but with a new book.

I think another cause for optimism is the unexpected boost reading receives from television and the Internet. Spinning through the many available T.V. channels, literary talk shows are readily showcased on cable stations, and publishers and authors and readers take up air time talking about books and reading. This extends, too, to the Internet:  I have yet to meet someone who hasn't at least heard— if not ordered from— one of the most accessible book stores on earth, amazon.com. In addition, full text articles and parts of books are now widely available electronically. Today, our televisions and our computers help support and extend reading.

So, from my perspective, it appears that reading as a widespread social and recreational activity is more alive and well than many might assume. To me, at least, reading does not seem currently endangered because my evidence tells me that many folks are reading and reading regularly.

But what I am describing is reading at large, reading outside the schools, reading, as it were, in the wild. Sadly, reading in school, specifically high school, is a different matter, and there, in my judgement, much silliness and even hypocrisy persist. Thus I do not view the future of reading in high school as optimistically as I see the future of reading in general, and I think

we must do something about that now. Right now.

It pains me to write this, but in high school it appears that much of our good sense about what readers need and who readers are evaporates. In high school we pay lip service to reading as an important activity, but we rarely make time for it in the school day, leaving our students with the unmistakable impression that reading is not important enough to occupy any part of their instructional time. It is surely clear to our students that we can make room within the school day for testing and counseling and yearbook pictures and even award assemblies and pep rallies, but allowing a student pick up a book or a magazine for a sustained period in an academic class is somehow wasting time. Letting students read *in* school should be one of our priorities; it reinforces to students— and it reminds us as educators— that reading is as valuable an instructional activity as any we can devise.

In high school, we also rarely talk about reading with our students as if it is any significant part of our adult lives. Thus reading seems to be an activity far below the stature of the latest sporting event we attended, the last movie we saw, the last trip we took, topics which many teachers regularly share with their students. If reading in school were an activity which was common and omnipresent, and if we, as teachers and adults, acted as if reading was important in our lives, perhaps we would feel more open talking with our students about reading in general and our own reading in particular.

Further, in school, particularly in English class, we often act as if reading is only one thing and involves only one kind of legitimate printed matter— all else does not qualify. Thus we jettison much nonfiction and almost all technical work; we scorn the contemporary and even the pop as if it is not real reading, certainly not worthy of our time. Inadvertently or sometimes directly, we tell our students that reading is only Keats and Austen and Morrison, never *Sports Illustrated* and Stephen King and *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul.* We thus tell

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students that the reading world is a very small one with fairly rigid boundaries. This is not

encouraging or inviting, and many of our students, accordingly, decline to enter that little,

circumscribed country of what we narrowly define as reading.

Finally, in high school the major way we credit reading is through testing, and, even

worse, through recall testing—what was the name of the man she met, when did the neighbor

find the dog's body; what time did the clock chime? It appears that reading, in school, is often

just another avenue to a mark in a grade book. Frequently, also, there is nothing other than fact-

oriented testing which occurs *after* a student has read. This is, without a doubt, a depressing and

narrow way to judge and to credit student reading, and it stifles one of the great pleasures of

reading, discussing and sharing with other readers and exploring more than the minutiae of plot

details.

This picture does not bode well for the future of reading in high school, a future which

can certainly be brighter, I think, if we can all agree:

--that reading is important enough that it as an activity should be pursued within the

school day;

--that we teachers, too, are readers and should talk with our students about our reading;

--that our students should be encouraged to see reading as wide ranging and

omnivorous, not just confined to a single genre (such as fiction or poetry) or to

established, classic authors;

--that there is much more that we can do after reading than administer a test which, in

many cases, measures only how much factual detail regarding plot that students can

recall.

At the beginning of this book John Mayher writes eloquently of living on the planet of

readers, of inviting our students to read joyfully and voluntarily and to respond to the call of

stories. The writers in the center of this volume offer ideas and strategies and approaches to ensure this kind of response. For my part, I offer my own ideas about students and reading and what we as teachers can do to further what is no less than a great enterprise. Certainly I can conclude this brief afterword with my own testimonial: reading has been utterly central to my life. It has informed, instructed, and inspired; it has taken me away when I needed to leave and has brought me back when I needed to return. If it were not for reading, my life, in almost all its aspects, would be painted in hues of gray.

As a teacher, as a reader, I look for the day when all of my students see reading similarly, as an adventure and a joy, as the non-negotiable centerpiece of a good life and, as Manguel maintains, an entrance ticket into our common past. I believe that goal can be achieved. If we refigure what we currently do in our classrooms, the future of reading in high school can be very bright indeed.

## B. Selected Research Studies (annotated)

Author:      Alden, Kristen C.; Lindquist, Jane M.; Lubkeman, Carrie A.

Title:        *Using Literature to Increase Reading Motivation*

Source:      ED481442 (Dissertation/Thesis); 2003

Notes:       Describes a project to increase grade four students' reading motivation; used the
following interventions: creating literature-rich classroom, conducting reading
interest survey, introducing variety of genres, book buddy discussions, all of
which resulted in increased motivation and led to improved reading skills.

Author:      Almanza, Tina

Title:        *The Effects of the DRTA and Cooperative Learning Strategies on Reading Comprehension*

Source:      ED405565; 1997 (Dissertation/Thesis)

Notes:       Comparison of cooperative learning groups vs. DRTA found that cooperative

reading groups scored higher on reading comprehension tests.

Author:     Baumgartner, Traci; Lipowski, Mary Beth; Rush, Christy

Title:      *Increasing Reading Achievement of Primary and Middle School Students through*

            *Differentiated Instruction*

Source:     ED479203 (Dissertation/Thesis); 2003

Notes:      Has a list of strategies to improve reading achievement; based on a review of the

            literature, differentiated instructional strategies were chosen: flexible grouping,

            student choice, increased self-selected reading time, and access to a variety of

            reading materials.

Author:     Block, Cathy Collins, ed.; Pressley, Michael, ed.

Title:      *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices – Solving Problems in the*

            *Teaching of Literacy*

Source:     New York: Guilford, 2002

Notes:      Book presents 25 essays on comprehension instruction that summarize current

            research and provide best-practice guidelines.

Author:     Brunn, Michael

Title:      "The Four-Square Strategy"

Source:     *Reading Teacher* v55 n6 p522-25 Mar 2002

Notes:      Use of graphic organizers helps students understand difficult concepts about

            literacy; four-square strategy integrates aspects of phonics instruction,

            penmanship, spelling, and vocabulary building.

Author:     Brynildssen, Shawna

Title:      "Recent Reading Initiatives: Examples of National, State, and Professional

Organizations' Efforts" Eric Digest.

Source:       ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication; 2002;

              ED469927

Notes:        Looks at some of the most recent initiatives to combat problem of poor literacy

              skills.

Author:       Carlson, Renee; Leonard, Susan; Matheis, Linda; Wilson, Bob

Title:        *Improving Students' Decoding Skills through the Use of Direct Instruction*

Source:       ED454547 (Dissertation/Thesis); 2001

Notes:        Describes a program to increase reading strategies in the first grade.

Author:       Dermody, Margaret

Title:        "Analysis of Embedded Skills Lessons for Literacy Groups with Inner City Title

              I Second Grade Students"

Source:       *Reading Improvement* v38 n1 p38-48 Spr 2001

Notes:        Explores effect of engagement of language abilities through motivational "real

              literature" material along with embedding of strategy lessons for literacy

              development.

Author:       Din, Feng S.

Title:        "Use Direct Instruction to Improve Reading Skills Quickly"

Source:       *Rural Educator* v21 n3 p1-4 Spr 2000

Notes:        Assesses effectiveness of direct instruction in improving reading skills.

Author:       Egawa, Kathy; Katahira Jennifer

Title:        "Read Aloud"

Source:       *Talking Points* v11 n2 p15-17 Apr-May 2000

Notes:        Reading aloud is cost effective, requires little preparation, develops listening

habits, builds language skills, aids reading comprehension.

Author:     Foes, Kathy; Sloan, Megan

Title:     *Improving Student Independent Reading Skills through Direct Phonics Instruction*

Source:     ED437620 (Thesis/Dissertation); 1999

Notes:     Describes a program for improving student independent reading skills through direct phonics instruction.

Author:     Furukawa, James M.; Ford, Barbara; Ayson, Elizabeth; Cambra, Kimberly; Takahashi, Linda; Yoshina, Karen

Title:     "Effects of a Cognitive Processing Strategy on Spelling, Definitions, and Reading"

Source:     ED427056; 1998 (paper presented at conference)

Notes:     CPC (Capacity, Pyramid, Chunking) Way of improving achievement resulted in improvement in spelling, definitions, and reading efficiency for high- and middle-capacity $6^{th}$ grade students.

Author:     Gill, Sharon Ruth

Title:     "Reading with Amy: Teaching and Learning through Reading Conferences"

Source:     *Reading Teacher* v53 n6 p500-09 Mar 2000

Notes:     Describes patterns in strategy use and teacher roles.

Author:     Harste, Jerome C.; Leland, Christine H.

Title:     "The Discus Thrower: The Reading of Literature as a Metaphor for Curricular Reform"

Source:     *New Advocate* v13 n1 p61-69 Win 2000

Notes:     Discusses what would happen if instruction were designed to parallel the thought processes readers use when they are interacting with literature; discusses

10 such thought processes.

Author:      Hasbrouck, Jan E.; Ihnot, Candyce; Rogers, Ginger H.

Title:       "'Read Naturally': A Strategy to Increase Oral Reading Fluency"

Source:      *Reading Research and Instruction* v39 n1 p27-38 Fall 1999

Notes:       Describes the Read Naturally strategy to improve reading fluency; strategy

             combines reading from a model, repeated readings, and process monitoring.

Author:      Laframboise, Kathryn L.

Title:       "Said Webs: Remedy for Tired Words"

Source:      *Reading Teacher* v53 n7 p540-42 Apr 2000

Notes:       Describes an instructional strategy that encourages students to examine clusters

             of words.

Author:      Lenski, Susan Davis; Nierstheimer, Susan L.

Title:       "Strategy Instruction from a Sociocognitive Perspective"

Source:      *Reading Psychology* v23 n2 p127-43 Apr-Jun 2002

Notes:       Describes the nature of strategy use and instruction.

Author:      Little, Queenie; Richards, Rhonda Taylor

Title:       "Teaching Learners – Learners Teaching: Using Reciprocal Teaching to

             Improve Comprehension Strategies in Challenged Readers"

Source:      *Reading Improvement* v37 n4 p190-94 Win 2000

Notes:       Describes reciprocal teaching strategy used with a group of struggling readers.

Author:      Nickell, Brian K.

Title:       *Improving Oral Fluency, Written Accuracy, and Reading Comprehension in the 3rd Grade

             Using Visual Art Content*

Source:      ED479867 (Dissertation/Thesis); 2003

Notes:      Interventions (such as higher order thinking skills, vocabulary word wall, draw

and tell strategy, read aloud strategy, and illustrating books, stories, and posters)

incorporated during a visual arts class improved oral fluency, written accuracy,

and reading comprehension in the regular classroom.

Author:     Rogers, Nancy

Title:      *Improving Students' Literacy through the Use of Rhythm and Rhyme*

Source:     ED479865 (Dissertation/Thesis); 2003

Notes:      Report describes a program for improving reading skills of first graders; target

population a blue-collar community.

Author:     Salembier, George B.

Title:      "SCAN and RUN:  A Reading Comprehension Strategy that Works"

Source:     *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* v42 n5 p386-94 Feb 1999

Notes:      Describes an instructional practice called "SCAN and RUN"; presents

"encouraging" preliminary results.

Author:     Williams, Joanna P.

Title:      "Strategic Processing of Text: Improving Reading Comprehension of Students

with Learning Disabilities" ERIC/OSEP Digest #599.

Source:     ED449596 (Digest based on book of the same name)

Notes:      Summarizes relevant research and promising practices in the strategic processing

of text.

## C. Selected Professional Books and Journals for Teachers at the Middle and Senior High Level (especially useful for struggling readers*)

Allen, Janet. 2000. *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4-12*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

*Beers, Kylene. 2003. *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

*____, ed. 2001. When Readers Struggle. Focus Issue in *Voices from the Middle*. 8:4 (May).

Ericson, Bonnie, ed. 2001. *High School Reading Instruction*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

*Gallagher, Kelly. 2003. *Reading Reasons: Motivational Mini-Lessons for Middle and High School*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

*Lesesne, Teri S. 2003. *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Student at the Right Time, Grades 4-12*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Marshall, Jodi Crum. 2002. *Are They Really Reading?: Expanding SSR in the Middle Grades*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Pirie, Bruce. 2002. *Teenage Boys and High School English*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Reid, Louann, ed. 2004. Secondary Readers Reading Successfully. Focus Issue in *English Journal*. 93:5 (May).

*Richardson, Judy S. 2000. *Read It Aloud! Using Literature in Secondary Content Classrooms*. Newark, DE: IRA.

Richardson, Judy S. and Raymond F. Morgan. 2003. *Reading to Learn in the Content Areas*. 5ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Tovani, Chris. 2003. *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?* York, ME: Stenhouse.

*____. 2000. *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Vacca, Richard and A. Vacca. 1998. *Content Area Reading: Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum.* New York: Addison Wesley.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. 1997. *You Gotta BE the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D., Tanya N. Baker and Julie Dube. 2001. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy, 6-12.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.