Expanding Literacy for Adolescents

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND LITERACY PROVIDERS IN ALL CONTENT AREAS, GRADES 7-12

Editor's Note:

Reprinted with permission are the executive summaries of two cutting-edge reports on improving adolescent literacy — ***Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*** and ***Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools.*** A collaboration of the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, these two reports offer a series of recommendations for improving student achievement. We commend them to your attention.

Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Issue

American youth need strong literacy skills to succeed in school and in life. Students who do not acquire these skills find themselves at a serious disadvantage in social settings, as civil participants, and in the working world. Yet approximately 8 million young people between fourth and 12th grade struggle to read at grade level. Some 70 percent of older readers require some form of remediation. Very few of these older struggling readers need help to read the words on a page; their most common problem is that they are not able to comprehend what they read. Obviously, the challenge is not a small one.

Meeting the needs of struggling adolescent readers and writers is not simply an altruistic goal. The emotional, social, and public health costs of academic failure have been well documented, and the consequences of the national literary crisis are too serious and far-reaching for us to ignore. Meeting these needs will require expanding the discussion of reading instruction from *Reading First* — acquiring grade-level reading skills by third grade — to *Reading Next* — acquiring the reading skills that can serve youth for a lifetime. Fortunately, a survey of the literacy field shows that educators now have a powerful array of tools at their disposal. We even know with a fair degree of certitude which tools work well for which type of struggling reader. However, we do not yet possess an overall strategy for directing and coordinating remedial tools for the maximum benefit to students at risk of academic failure, nor do we know enough about how current programs and approaches can be most effectively combined.

The Approach

To help address this problem, a panel of five nationally known and respected educational researchers met in spring 2004 with representatives of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education to draw up a set of recommendations for how to meet the needs of our 8 million struggling readers while simultaneously envisioning a way to propel the field forward. The resulting paper was reviewed and augmented by the Adolescent Literacy Funders Forum (ALFF) at its 2004 annual meeting. Although this report originally was targeted to the funding community, it offers information that will also prove invaluable to others, including researchers, policymakers, and educators.

The Recommendations

The 15 Elements of Effective Adolescent Literacy Programs

This report delineates 15 elements aimed at improving middle and high school literacy achievement right now.

1. Direct, explicit comprehension instruction, which is instruction in the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read, including summarizing, keeping track of one's own understanding, and a host of other practices.

2. Effective instructional principles embedded in content, including language arts teachers using content-area texts and content-area teachers providing instruction and practice in reading and writing skills specific to their subject area.

3. Motivation and self-directed learning, which includes building motivation to read and learn and providing students with the instruction and supports needed for independent learning tasks they will face after graduation.

4. Text-based collaborative learning, which involves students interacting with one another around a variety of texts.

5. Strategic tutoring, which provides students with intense individualized reading, writing, and content instruction as needed.

6. Diverse texts, which are texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics.

7. Intensive writing, including instruction connected to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform well in high school and beyond.

8. A technology component, which includes technology as a tool for and a topic of literacy instruction.

9. Ongoing formative assessment of students, which is informal, often daily assessment of how students are progressing under current instructional practices.

10. Extended time for literacy, which includes approximately two to four hours of literacy instruction and practice that takes place in language arts and content-area classes.

11. Professional development that is both long term and ongoing.

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12. Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs, which is more formal and provides data that are reported for accountability and research purposes.

13. Teacher teams, which are interdisciplinary teams that meet regularly to discuss students and align instruction.

14. Leadership, which can come from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students present in schools.

15. A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program, which is interdisciplinary and interdepartmental and may even coordinate with out-of-school organizations and the local community.

Since implementation of only one or two of these elements is unlikely to improve the achievement of many students, this report recommends that practitioners and program designers flexibly try out various combinations in search of the most effective overall program. Furthermore, any combination should include three specific elements: professional development, formative assessment, and summative assessment. No literacy program targeted at older readers is likely to cause sig-nificant improvements without these elements, because of their importance to ensuring instructional effectiveness and measuring effects. However, they should not be seen as sufficient in themselves to address the wide range of problems experienced by older, struggling readers; rather, they act as a foundation for instructional innovations.

Balancing Purposes

This report also stresses that improving the literacy achievement of today's and tomorrow's youth requires keeping action balanced with research. The report outlines a balanced vision for effecting immediate change for current students and building the literacy field's knowledge base. Stakeholders should select programs and interventions according to the inclusion or exclusion of the fifteen elements-thereby creating a planned variation-and evaluate implementation using a common process to allow for comparisons across programs. In line with this recommendation, outcomes and procedures for evaluation are detailed to promote cross-program comparisons. By collecting data according to the recommended design, public and private funders, districts, and researchers will be able to disaggregate students and describe the different sources of their difficulty and the differentiated effects of programs and program components. Such disaggregation will provide a rich base for experimental research.

The Relevance

We believe that if the funding, research, policymaking, and education communities embrace these recommendations, the literacy field will make significant strides toward the goal of meeting the needs of all students in our society, while also strengthening our understanding of exactly what works, when, and for whom. We will thereby strengthen the chances for striving readers to graduate from high school as strong, independent learners prepared to take on the multiple challenges of life in a global economy.

For the complete *Reading Next* report, go to *www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/reading_next*

CITATION FOR *READING NEXT*

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006). *Reading next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy:* A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Reproduced with permission.

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Writing Proficiency Crisis

Writing well is not just an option for young people-it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy. Yet every year in the United States large numbers of adolescents graduate from high school unable to write at the basic levels required by colleges or employers. In addition, every school day 7,000 young people drop out of high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006), many of them because they lack the basic literacy skills to meet the growing demands of the high school curriculum (Kamil, 2003; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Because the definition of literacy includes both reading and writing skills, poor writing proficiency should be recognized as an intrinsic part of this national literacy crisis.

This report offers a number of specific teaching techniques that research suggests will help fourth- to 12th-grade students in our nation's schools. The report focuses on all students, not just those who display writing difficulties, although this latter group is deservedly the focus of much attention. The premise of this report is that all students need to become proficient and flexible writers. In this report, the term low-achieving writers is used to refer to students whose writing skills are not adequate to meet classroom demands. Some of these low-achieving writers have been identified as having learning disabilities; others are the "silent majority" who lack writing proficiency but do not receive additional help. As will be seen in this report, some studies investigate the effects of writing instruction on groups of students across the full range of ability, from more effective to less effective writers, while others focus specifically on individuals with low writing proficiency.

Recent reports by the National Commission on Writing (2003, 2004, 2005) have helped to bring the importance of writing proficiency forward into the public consciousness. These reports provide a jumping-off point for thinking about how to improve writing instruction for all young people, with a special focus on struggling readers. *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004), commissioned by Carnegie Corporation of New York, used up-to-date research to highlight a number of key elements seen as essential to improving reading instruction for adolescents (defined as grades 4-12). *Writing Next* sets out to provide guidance for improving writing instruction for adolescents, a topic that has previously not received enough attention from researchers or educators.

Resources

While *Reading Next* presented general methods and interventions that several of America's most respected adolescent literacy experts found to be useful for improving reading instruction, *Writing Next* highlights specific teaching techniques that work in the classroom. It does so by summarizing the results of a large-scale statistical review of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents' writing proficiency. Although several important reviews of research on writing instruction exist (e.g., Langer & Applebee, 1987; Levy & Ransdell, 1996; MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2006), the special strength of this report is its use of a powerful statistical method known as meta-analysis. This technique allows researchers to determine the consistency and strength of the effects of instructional practices on student writing quality and to highlight those practices that hold the most promise.

The Recommendations
Eleven Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they do not constitute a full writing curriculum.

1. Writing Strategies, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions.

2. Summarization, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts.

3. Collaborative Writing, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions.

4. Specific Product Goals, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete.

5. Word Processing, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.

6. Sentence Combining, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences.

7. Prewriting, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.

8. Inquiry Activities, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.

9. Process Writing Approach, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.

10. Study of Models, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.

11. Writing for Content Learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material.

The *Writing Next* elements do not constitute a full writing curriculum, any more than the *Reading Next* elements did for reading. However, all of the *Writing Next* instructional elements have shown clear results for improving students' writing. They can be combined in flexible ways to strengthen adolescents' literacy development. The authors hope that besides providing research-supported information about effective writing instruction for classroom teachers, this report will stimulate discussion and action at policy and research levels, leading to solid improvements in writing instruction in grades 4 to 12 nationwide.

For the complete *Writing Next* report, go to: *www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/writing_next*

CITATION FOR *WRITING NEXT*

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools* - A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Reproduced with permission.

Additional Resources

American Federation of Teachers

http://aft.org/topics/reading/index.htm

International Reading Association

www.reading.org/General/Default.aspx

Founded in 1956, IRA is a nonprofit, global network of individuals and institutions committed to worldwide literacy. With more than 70,000 members, it supports literacy professionals through a wide range of resources, advocacy efforts, volunteerism, and professional development activities.

Members promote high levels of literacy for all by: improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit.

IRA/resources on Adolescent Literacy

www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesByTopic/Adolescent/Overview.aspx

IRA/resources on Reading Comprehension K-12

http://www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesByTopic/Comprehension/Overview.aspx

National Council of Teachers of English

www.ncte.org/

NCTE is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education.

NCTE/National Day on Writing

To draw attention to the remarkable variety of writing we engage in and help make better writers from all walks of life aware of their craft, NCTE established Oct. 20, 2009, as the National Day on Writing and will build an archive of writing submissions throughout 2010 in the National Gallery of Writing. To learn more about how to participate, go to *www.ncte.org/action/dayonwriting*.

NCTE Resources for Reading in the Content Areas:

The following reports are located at *www.ncte.org/search?q=adolescent+literacy*

NCTE/Consultants and Services on Content Area Literacy

Read Write Think: Lesson Plan: Astronomy Poetry: Combining Poetry ...

Read Write Think: Lesson Plan: ABC Bookmaking Builds Vocabulary in ...

Making Meaningful Connections to Content Areas

Reading Corner

Resolution on Federal Support for Programs in English and Reading

Speaking and Workshop Topics Books by Amy Benjamin

Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse

NCTE Resources on Adolescent literacy

The following reports are located at *www.ncte.org/search?q=reading+in+the+content+areas*

Pathways for Advancing Adolescent Literacy

NCTE Professional Development Supporting Teacher Effectiveness and Improving Student Achievement

Pathways for Advancing Adolescent Literacy is a yearlong professional development program that helps teachers, schools, and districts address the unique needs of adolescent learners with content on key areas such as gradual release of responsibility, 21st-century literacy, closing the achievement gap, content area literacy, and assessment.

NCTE/Pathways for Advancing Adolescent Literacy

Consultants and Services on Adolescent Literacy

Adolescent Literacy and the Effect of Standards

Adolescent Literacy at Risk? The Impact of Standards

NCTE Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform

Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice

National Education Association

www.nea.org

NEA Resources on Reading
www.nea.org/home/18272.htm

NEA Reading Resources from Other Organizations

www.nea.org/home/18700.htm

NEA Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas Online Discussion
http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit/index.jsp

National Institute for Literacy

www.nifl.gov/

This federal agency provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth, and adults.

NIFL resources on adolescent literacy and literacy in content areas

The following reports and more can be found at *www.nifl.gov/adolescence/adolescence.html*

Applying Research In Reading Instruction for Adults 2005

What Content Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy

Adolescence —
The National Institute for Literacy

Adolescent Literacy —
State of the Science

Adolescent Teaching Approaches —
National Institute for Literacy

NIFL Resources on Working With Adolescent English Language Learners in Content Areas

The following reports and more are linked at *www.nifl.gov/cgibin/nifl/combined_search.cgi?mode=site_search&keyword=english+language+learners*

Supporting Adult English Language Learners' Transitions to Postsecondary School

Reading and Adult English Language Learners: A review of the Research

Managing Programs for Adult English Language Learners

Discussion Summary — Working with English Language Learners

Practical Strategies for Working with Literacy-Level Adult English Language Learners

Additional Resources

NYS Education Department

Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction, 4-12

www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Academic%20Literacy.pdf

This document, developed by the Center on Instruction's Reading, Special Education and ELL Strands, makes recommendations for improving literacy-related instruction in the content areas or across the entire school day, interventions for students reading below grade level, and recommendations for supporting literacy development in adolescent English language learners.

NYS Center on Instruction

www.centeroninstruction.org/resources.cfm?category=reading&subcat

The Center on Instruction, a partnership of five organizations, provides resources and expertise to the Regional Comprehensive Centers in reading, mathematics, science, special education, and English language learners. The center has added a new resource, Adolescent Literacy Resources: An Annotated Bibliography, to its Web site. This array of research summaries and policy documents on reading and reading comprehension for students in grades 4-12, while not exhaustive, includes discussions of all the current important research issues in adolescent literacy and the development of state- and district-level policies to support improvements in adolescent literacy outcomes.

NYS Striving Readers Grant

www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/index.html

The Striving Readers program grants are designed to raise the literacy levels of adolescent students in Title I-eligible schools and to build a strong, scientific research base for identifying and replicating strategies that improve adolescent literacy instruction. This year, New York state is the recipient of a Striving Readers grant. An essential component of the grant is that a supplemental literacy intervention program must be implemented with fidelity and complete adherence to an intervention program design during the 2010-11, 20011-12, and 2012-13 school years.

NYS Reading Resource Center

Articles Related to Comprehension
http://nysrrc.monroe.edu/?q=node/188
Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents

NYS Articles Related to Vocabulary

http://nysrrc.monroe.edu/?q=search/node/adolescent%20literacy

NEW! NYS Guidance for Locally Required Summer Reading Assignments

www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/summerreading09.html
The State Education Department has long encouraged students to read during the summer. If your school district is requiring a student to complete a reading assignment over the summer, there are a few requirements to consider.

2010 Statewide Summer Reading Program

www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/summer/
The New York Statewide Summer Reading Program is an annual program that brings children and families into local public libraries for reading and activities.

For more information on NYS English language arts, visit *www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela.html*

U.S. Department of Education

www.free.ed.gov/subjects.cfm?subject_id =80&toplvl=78&res_feature_request=1

NEW! Free Federal Resources for Educational Excellence: Reading Resources

This U.S. Department of Education Web site includes links to dozens of free reading resources, including how to help your child become a reader and improving adolescent literacy.

NEW! Library of Congress Resource

www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/digitalcoll/ digitalcoll-children.html

Children's Literature: Digitized Print Materials

This Web site provides 50 digitized texts of rare books, including: *The Arabian Nights, A Child's Garden of Verses, Ballad of the Lost Hare, A Christmas Carol, Humpty Dumpty, The Grasshopper Stories, Mother Goose Finger Plays, The Pied Piper of Hamelin, The Rocket Book, The Secret Garden, Stories from Hans Andersen, The Three Bears, Three Little Pigs, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* and others.

Other Resources

Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy (2005)
www.nea.org/home/18700.htm

This report from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices lays out the compelling case of why we should care about adolescent literacy. It describes five strategies that governors and states should pursue to improve adolescent literacy. It also describes resources for adolescent literacy initiatives, gives examples of promising state and local adolescent literacy practices, lists contacts for more information on promising practices, and identifies potential funding sources for these kinds of programs.

Reading Rockets
www.readingrockets.org

This PBS series promotes and encourages children's literacy. The Web site offers interviews with authors, issues for teachers, summer reading lists, and wide-ranging activities and information for the educator are posted and updated regularly. You can e-mail the site with questions and suggestions and sign up for online newsletters and announcements.

Additional Resources

¡Colorín Colorado!

www.colorincolorado.org

The first major Web site created specifically for Spanish-speaking parents to help their children learn to read includes resources for teachers and librarians to reproduce and distribute to parents: information on how parents can use stories, discussions, songs, rhymes and games in either Spanish or English to increase literacy in children.

SCANS Skills

http://wdr.doleta.gov/SCANS

A high-performance workplace requires workers who have a solid foundation in the basic literacy and computational skills, the thinking skills, and in the personal qualities that make workers dedicated and trustworthy. High-performance workplaces also require competencies: the ability to manage resources, to work amicably and productively with others, to acquire and use information, to master complex systems, and to work with a variety of technologies. This, the SCANS final report, provides a blueprint for groups at the national, state, and local levels.

ELL Student Success: The Path to College

www.colorincolorado.org/article/29256

For English language learners, the challenges of going to and applying to college can be overwhelming. ELL teachers can play an important role in this process. This section features a number of articles with great ideas for ways that ELL educators can support their students as they consider their future plans.

Guide to Reading Comprehension Assessments for Adolescents

This guide draws together evidence on nine of the most commonly used, commercially available reading comprehension assessments for use with adolescents. It provides a critical view into the strengths and weaknesses of each. Authors Lelia Morsy, Michael Kieffer, and Catherine Snow focus on the utility of assessments for the purposes of screening groups of students to identify those who struggle and diagnosing their specific needs. Available at *www.carnegie.org/literacy/tta/pdf/tta_Morsy.pdf.*

Other Resources

Torgensen, J.K., Houston, D.D., Rissman ,L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Francis, D. J., Rivera, M. O., & Lesaux, N. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction.* Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. *www.centeroninstruction.org.*

Wood, Karen, D., Dickinson, Thomas, S., (2000). *Promoting literacy in grades 4-9: A Handbook for Teachers and Administrators.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.