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Key Areas of E f ective Adolescent Literacy Programs

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Abstract

This paper reviews best practices for e f ective adolescent literacy programs. A focus is placed on f ve areas of literacy instruction including word study, f uency, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation. Each of these areas is discussed as well as how each area is relevant to reading and understanding narrative and content-area text at high levels.

Keywor ds adolescent literacy, academic literacy, vocabulary, comprehension, narrative, content-area, f uency, motivation, word study

“ t no other time in our history has the ability to read been so important to all members of society” (Coyne, Kame’enui, & Carnine, 2011, p. 50). In fact, learning to read is the most important skill our students can learn in school, serving as the very foundation of all other academic subjects. Consider the following statistics noted by Brozo (2009)—about two-thirds of eighth and twelfth graders read below grade level; 32% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level English composition courses; 40% of high school graduates do not have the literacy skills required by employers; and 1.2 million students drop out of high school every year with literacy skills lower than those in most industrialized nations. Ensuring adolescents become literate, productive members of society is an undertaking that may not only increase the number of students who graduate from high school, succeed in college, and work in jobs that support a healthy lifestyle, but may also save the nation billions of dollars.

According to Graham and Hebert (2010), $16 billion a year is spent by universities and businesses due to students’ inadequate reading and writing skills. “Somewhere between one half to two thirds of new jobs in the future will require a college education and higher-level literacy skills” (Graham & Hebert, 2010, p. 7). With regard to the workplace, 40% of high school graduates e wequire era

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Narrative text describes events that occur through time that are "related through a causal or thematic chain" (Brewer, 1980, p. 223). In general, narrative text involves reading presented as nonfction (e.g., biographies and memoirs) or fction (e.g., novels and fables) that tells the reader (Dymock, 2007; Harris & Hodges, 1995). Research indicates that lower knowledge readers may beneft more from content delivered through narrative text that facilitates interest and builds beter background knowledge (Wolfe & Mienko, 2007).

Adolescent students might struggle to read narrative text for a myriad of reasons. Narrative text encompasses a wide breadth of genres, in both fction and nonfction domains. As students progress through grade levels, the narrative text they are exposed to becomes increasingly complex (Dymock, 2007). Moreover, a lack of knowledge about narrative text structure, a skill generally acquired before or during early elementary education (Stein & Glenn, 1979), can broadly interfere with student comprehension across academic areas (National Institute for Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Similarly, there may be fewer opportunities for struggling students to read narrative types of text at more advanced grade levels, and what narrative text they are exposed to will generally be comprised of content at a consistently advanced level. Finally, while lower knowledge readers may beneft more from content delivered via narrative text (Wolfe & Mienko, 2007), the majority of academic text for adolescent readers is expository in nature (Sáenz & Fuchs, 2002).

To be academically literate, the ability to read content-area text is an essential requirement. Content area is specifc to certain subjects in a school seting. In general, most students can read and decode simple text but struggle with more complicated materials that are often present in middle and high school setings, namely science and social studies textbooks (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Therefore, literacy and learning within the content areas has become a critical feature of success for adolescent readers (Kosanovich et al., 2010). Research supports the notion that reading instruction should not end in the elementary grades but should continue throughout school. Adolescent readers need to develop more complex skills in order to learn from the increasingly specialized and complicated texts they will encounter in middle and high school (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010).

Reading content-area text is difficult for several reasons. First, students typically have fewer experiences with expository text (Lenski, Wham, Johns, & Caskey, 2007). Second, the reading material in content-area text is often denser than the material in narrative text (Coyne et al., 2011). The organization is typically harder to follow (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Sáenz & Fuchs, 2002), and the vocabulary is increasingly technical (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Ediger, 2002; Fang, 2006; Sáenz & Fuchs, 2002). Third, reading the cumbersome multipart words found in and associated with science and social studies textbooks can be a significant stumbling block (Fang, 2006). Finally, the content in textbooks is based on the assumption that the readers have some previous knowledge of the topic at hand (Sáenz & Fuchs, 2002). In fact, Lee and Spratley (2010) stated that being able to comprehend written text is not a fixed ability but instead involves an interactive relationship between the text and prior knowledge and skills of the reader.

Adolescent Literacy

Adolescent literacy is focused reading instruction for students in grades 4 through 12. In a survey of reading experts conducted by the International Reading Association, adolescent literacy is considered a "very hot" topic. In fact, this topic "first appeared on the survey in 2001 and in 2006 attained 'very hot' status and has remained so ever since" (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Scheitel, 2010/2011, p. 1). Results of this survey illustrate a change in how "instructional business" is conducted in the primary grades (K-3). Instruction has been centered on teaching the basics of reading— Reading instruction for older students has now shifted from the foundational focus of in grades K-3 to for students in grades 4 and above. In 1997, Congress asked the NICHD to coordinate a panel to examine the research base and the efficacy of various instructional practices related to early reading (grades K-3). As a result, the National Reading Panel [NRP] was formed. In 2000, the NRP published the

addressed 15 components that best describe instructional practices for adolescent readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The components encompass instructional and infrastructure improvements necessary for e f ective literacy programs. The 15 elements include: (a) explicit comprehension instruction, (b) e f ective principles embedded in content, (c) motivation and self directed learning, (d) text-based collaborative learning, (e) strategic tutoring, (f) diverse texts, (g) intensive writing, (h) technology, (i) ongoing formative assessment, (j) extended time for literacy, (k) professional development, (l) ongoing summative assessments of students and programs, (m) teacher teams, (n) leadership, and (o) a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program. Research reviews and meta-analyses on adolescent literacy instruction followed (see Boardman et al., 2008; Kamil et al., 2008; Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008; Scammacca et al., 2007; and Torgesen et al., 2007 for details). Funding on adolescent literacy initiatives became evident. For example, the Striving Readers program was developed. The Striving Readers program is funded and endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and focuses comprehensive literacy support for students from birth to grade 12.

The challenges of adolescent literacy are vast. The 2009 report of the (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009) showed that while scores exhibited a slight increase from 2007, there were still a disproportionate number of fourth- and eighth-grade students reading below grade level. The National Assessment of Educational Progress uses the term and to describe levels of reading achievement. The level indicates only partial mastery of knowledge that is required for that grade level. The level shows competence over grade-level material. For fourth grade, only 33% were at or above the pro f cient level, with 67% scoring at the basic level or below. The results for eighth grade showed only 32% at or above the pro f cient level, with 68% scoring at the basic level or below. Finally, in the twelfth grade, 38% scored at or above the pro f cient level, with 62% scoring at the basic level or below (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). These numbers are staggering considering that the level denotes only partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge that is essential to performing at grade level. Students should be performing at pro f cient levels to handle the kinds of text they will encounter in the upper grades.

Further, about 8 million adolescent students experience di f culty reading at their appropriate grade level (ACT, 2006; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). In fact, “some 70 percent of older readers require some

psychologists. No matter what research synthesis was reviewed, "the conclusions were clear: Explicit instruction should be a consistent mainstay of working with students both with and without learning

The best method of improving reading fuency is through repeated oral reading (Hasbrouck, 2006; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006; Therrien, 2004). Fluency is a crucial element in adolescent literacy because if readers can devote less time and efort to decoding the words they are reading, they can spend more time understanding the words. Repeated reading typically requires students to read a particular passage several times until a desired goal is met (e.g., 100 correct words per minute [cwpm]) or for a certain length of time (e.g., 10 minutes). When using repeated oral reading, Boardman et al. (2008) recommended using passages with previously taught vocabulary that are at the students' reading level. In efect, repeated readings lead to increased vocabulary recognition with sight words and general vocabulary words, provide more practice opportunities for struggling readers, and are useful for fuency timings to monitor students' reading progress.

Boardman et al. (2008) defned vocabulary development as

Beck et al. (2002) suggest teachers focus vocabulary instruction on tier 2 words while also explicitly teaching tier 3 words to relevant content areas. McEwan (2007) offered several guidelines to teach vocabulary to mastery. First, teachers should post the vocabulary in the classroom to serve as a visual aid for those who may have trouble with the pronunciations. Second, teachers should provide student-friendly defini-

Taxonomy is important because it can be helpful in creating questions that support or encourage higher order thinking in students.

Question generation requires students to develop and ask their own questions based on what they are reading (Hashey & Connors, 2003; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996; Vaughn & Bos, 2009). When students generate questions, they are typically more motivated to read the text, clarify information they do not know, and exhibit inferential thinking (Tovani, 2000). Evidence also suggests that writing questions and answers makes the information easier to remember and provides more opportunity to interact with the content of the text (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Readers who struggle often fail to understand that deriving meaning from text requires active probing for meaning (Duffy, 2003).

Graphic organizers are visual aids that help students remember, organize, and identify key information from their reading. Some examples of graphic organizers include Venn diagrams, concept maps, and story maps. Boardman et al. (2008) give several suggestions for the use of graphic organizers in the classroom. They can be used before reading to introduce information and to make predictions. During reading, they can be used to evoke discus-

prominent techniques for gleaning information from text (Vaughn &

described six evidence-based principles for increasing motivation specifically in content-area classrooms. These include (a) elevating self-efficacy, (b) creating interest in new learning, (c) making an inside/outside literacy connection, (d) expanding choices and options, (e) offering an abundance of interesting texts, and (f) offering structured collaboration. With implementation of these six principles teachers can begin to create an engaging and motivating environment of learning for their students in content rich classes such as science and social studies.

Collaborative learning is a motivational method that allows students work in small groups to work out a problem or discuss a topic. All cooperative learning methods operate on the notion that students work together to learn the content and all are responsible for each other's learning (Slavin, 1996). The research supports the usefulness of collaborative learning at all grade levels because of increased student achievement as well as improved relationships and increased self-esteem (Slavin, 1996). The number of opportunities struggling students have to respond to text is increased when the students can collaborate with their peers. Similarly, when strug

has given educators the tools they need to bolster their instructional practices and they need only to review such documents to greatly increase students' academic achievement. If educators responsibly and reliably follow the 15 essential elements of effective literacy programs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) as well as focus their attention on

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