

Resources for Improving Low Literacy Levels in Adolescents

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PROMOTING ADOLESCENTS' COMPREHENSION OF TEXT



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Introduction

National and international studies reveal that significant numbers of adolescents and young adults do not adequately understand complex texts, impeding their school success, access to postsecondary learning, and opportunities within our increasingly competitive work environment (Faggella-Luby, Graner, Donald, & Valentino, 2012; Kamil et al., 2008; Morsy, Kieffer, & Snow, 2010). Annual student growth in reading achievement is greatest during elementary school and declines considerably over time, with high school students making the least growth (Bloom, Hill, Black, & Lipsey, 2008). Reports by ACT (2009; 2013) reveal that only 44% of tested students are ready to read and understand college-level text, with more students “on track” in 8th grade than in 12th grade. These reports are troubling because the students who take the ACT test are self-identified as being interested in postsecondary schooling. The ACT report states, **“The clearest differentiator between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to understand complex text”** (p. 12). Of great concern is the finding that males, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and students from families whose annual incomes are less than \$30,000 are most at risk for having very low reading comprehension (ACT, 2009; 2013). Finally, the Program for International Student Assessment indicates that the United States ranks 21st among the 30 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries on literacy-related outcomes (2014).

The literacy challenge is even greater for students with disabilities. In 2013, 69% of fourth-graders and 60% of eighth-graders with disabilities scored below the basic level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test, indicating performance well below grade-level expectations. In contrast, for students without disabilities, only 27% of fourth-graders and 18% of eighth-graders scored below the basic level. These data suggest that instruction through current educational programming might not be sufficiently robust to meet the educational needs of many students with disabilities. Thus, there is compelling evidence that key educational stakeholders (parents, teachers, paraeducators, educational leaders, and policymakers) would benefit from models demonstrating effective practices for improving literacy outcomes for students with disabilities.

Review of Interventions Implemented for Students With Reading Disabilities

Several empirical syntheses have focused on the impact of reading interventions for secondary students with reading difficulties (Edmonds et al., 2009; Scammacca et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Wanzek et al., 2013). Edmonds et al. examined reading comprehension outcomes of 13 studies in which instruction in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension was provided to students in grades 6 through 12. The findings indicated an overall mean-weighted effect size (ES) in the moderate range (mean $d = 0.35$) with word-level interventions for comprehension outcomes, favoring students in the treatment conditions. Multicomponent reading interventions compared with control conditions were most effective (ES = 0.72) for enhancing reading comprehension outcomes for students with reading difficulties. Targeted reading interventions in comprehension, multiple reading components, and word reading strategies were all identified as promising practices.

In a more recent meta-analysis, Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, and Stuebing (2013) reported that the addition of studies completed since original publication resulted in much smaller mean ESs for secondary students. Studies published after 2005 yielded a smaller mean ES (0.49) than studies published between 1980 and 2004 (mean ES of 0.95). For standardized measures of reading, the mean ES was 0.21 for studies published after 2005, much smaller than the 0.42 mean ES reported for studies published between 1980 and 2004.

Although the Edmonds et al. (2009) and Scammacca et al. (2013) syntheses provide valuable sources for research-based practices at the secondary level, Wanzek et al. (2013) used meta-analytic techniques to investigate intensive reading interventions for students with reading difficulties in grades 4 to 12, providing critical information. The majority of studies implemented multi-component interventions (e.g., word study with fluency and comprehension). Other treatment conditions included multisensory phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, self-visual imagery, self-questioning, paraphrasing, and inference instruction. Mean ESs ranged from 0.10 to 0.16 for comprehension, word reading, word reading fluency, reading fluency, and spelling outcomes. No significant differences in students' outcomes were explained by instructional group size, number of hours of intervention, or grade level of intervention.

As one of many efforts to improve adolescent literacy outcomes for students with disabilities, the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs has provided funding to three teams to develop models for improving instructional practices for older students with disabilities in reading.

Adolescent Literacy Resources to Improve Reading Outcomes of Students With Disabilities

The following materials and resources, grouped by resource center, are not meant to serve as an exhaustive list of all materials and resources that might be useful in improving literacy outcomes for students with disabilities.

The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University

This center is a resource for parents, educators, interventionists, and administrators that offers a variety of resources on evidence-based practices and programs, including multistep instructional training modules with videos and activities.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu

Secondary Reading Instruction, Part I

This module describes how teachers can incorporate vocabulary and reading comprehension skills instruction into content area lessons and serves as an introduction to a variety of effective practices—including the use of graphic organizers—to help students better understand what they read.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/sec-rdng

Secondary Reading Instruction, Part II

This module examines some of the reasons that adolescents struggle with content area text and provides an overview of effective strategies teachers can use to improve the vocabulary and comprehension skills of students with a wide range of abilities and across a variety of subjects.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/sec-rdng2

Teaching Vocabulary and Comprehension in the Content Areas

This module describes how teachers can incorporate vocabulary and reading comprehension skills instruction into content area lessons and introduces a variety of effective practices.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/sec_rdng/chalcycle.htm

PALS

This module outlines the logistics and benefits of implementing PALS, a peer-tutoring strategy for high school in which students work in pairs to strengthen their reading skills.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/palshs

Student Progress Monitoring

This multipart module examines how progress monitoring can affect academic outcomes for students and demonstrates how to implement curriculum-based measurement in a classroom of students.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/gpm

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)

This module presents a strategy for helping students improve their reading comprehension skills. It also outlines the logistics and benefits of implementing this comprehension strategy, in which students work together in small groups as they read text from a content area, such as social studies or science.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/csr/

Intensive Intervention, Part I

This module, the first in a series of two modules on intensive intervention, provides an overview of data-based individualization and provides information about adaptations for intensifying and individualizing instruction. Developed in collaboration with the National Center on Intensive Intervention and the CEEDAR Center, this resource is designed for individuals who implement intensive interventions (e.g., special education teachers, reading specialists, interventionists).

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/dbi1

Intensive Intervention, Part II

This module, the second in the series, offers information on making data-based instructional decisions. Specifically, the resource pertains to collecting and analyzing progress-monitoring and diagnostic assessment data.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/dbi2

Evidence-Based Practices

This multipart module focuses on the importance of identifying and selecting appropriate evidence-based practices and presents tools for implementation fidelity and evaluation.

www.iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ebp_01

The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk

This center at The University of Texas at Austin is dedicated to the implementation of empirically validated practices to improve academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for all learners. The institutes within the center focus on specific areas of education.

www.meadowscenter.org

Reading Institute

This institute focuses on understanding reading difficulties for students at all grade levels and validating evidence-based practices to prevent and remediate these difficulties.

www.meadowscenter.org/institutes/reading-institute

Response to Intervention Institute

This institute spotlights projects and research that focus on providing technical assistance to build capacity for implementing response to intervention (RTI).

www.meadowscenter.org/institutes/response-to-intervention-institute

Middle School Matters Institute

The goal of this institute is to prepare middle school students for high school and postsecondary success.

www.meadowscenter.org/institutes/middle-school-matters

Dropout Prevention Institute

This institute is dedicated to understanding the causes of school dropout and developing interventions to prevent dropout and increase engagement.

www.meadowscenter.org/institutes/dropout-prevention-institute

National Center on Intensive Intervention

This center at the American Institutes for Research works in conjunction with many of the nation's most distinguished data-based individualization experts. It is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs and is part of its Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network.

www.intensiveintervention.org

Center on Response to Intervention

This center supports states, districts, and schools implementing RTI. The center provides a range of resources (e.g., training modules, archived webinars, videos, briefs) that focus on supporting the implementation of multitiered approaches like RTI and multitiered systems of support to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. These resources contain important information about the essential components of screening, progress monitoring, multilevel prevention systems, and data-based decision making.

www.rti4success.org

Center on Instruction

This center features materials and resources related to research-based instruction to support students, including those with the most intensive needs.

www.centeroninstruction.org

Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers

This suite of resources has two purposes: (a) it guides the delivery of instruction for adolescent struggling readers, particularly secondary interventions in the general education context, and (b) it deepens technical assistance providers' knowledge of reading-related issues for adolescents with reading difficulties or learning disabilities and enriches providers' work with state and local education agencies. Detailing selected research-based instructional practices associated with positive effects for adolescent struggling readers, the suite comprises (a) a meta-analysis, (b) a practice brief, (c) a professional development module, and (d) training-of-trainers materials.

www.centeroninstruction.org/effective-instruction-for-adolescent-struggling-readers---second-edition

Bringing Literacy Strategies Into Content Instruction

Intended for use by literacy specialists and other technical assistance providers, this resource details ways to assist states, districts, and schools in helping teachers develop the kinds of pedagogical skills needed to implement instructional practices that have been shown to improve student literacy outcomes. This resource also provides research-based guidance on academic literacy instruction in the content areas, specifically focusing on the effective use of text. It provides an overview of research evidence pertaining to content area literacy instruction for adolescents, and it suggests ways teachers can use content area texts to help students understand the associated vocabulary and concepts. It also provides a brief synopsis of working with adult learners and the most promising professional development practices identified in research.

www.centeroninstruction.org/bringing-literacy-strategies-into-content-instruction

Online Course

A free, self-paced online course consisting of four modules accompanies *Bringing Literacy Strategies Into Content Instruction*. Module 1 provides an introduction to academic literacy instruction; a discussion of key elements from the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading framework, as it relates to content area teaching and learning; and academic literacy recommendations. Module 2 contains a general discussion of research-based vocabulary instruction and guiding questions to help participants understand and reflect on the instruction described in the vocabulary vignettes. Module 3 contains a general discussion of research-based comprehension instruction and guiding questions to help participants understand and reflect on the instruction described in the comprehension vignettes. Module 4 summarizes professional development research findings, especially as they relate to content area teachers, and provides recommendations that state-, district-, or school-level leaders can apply to designing professional development that is effective in supporting content area instruction. New users can create a free account for access to this and other online courses.

www.centeroninstruction.org/bringing-literacy-strategies-into-content-instruction

Florida Center for Reading Research

This multidisciplinary research center at Florida State University offers free activities and reading resources for teachers and administrators.

www.fcrr.org

Principal Reading Walk-Through Checklists

This is a tool for administrators to effectively structure classroom visits to observe effective reading instruction. It provides a snapshot of classroom organization, instruction, and learning opportunities for both reading-focused interventions and content area instruction.

www.fcrr.org/for-educators/principal_checklists.asp

CEEDAR Center

This technical assistance center provides states and institutions of higher education with a variety of resources on evidence-based practices, such as innovation configurations, which help teachers evaluate and improve their implementation of evidence-based practices.

<http://cedar.education.ufl.edu>

Innovation Configurations: Evidence-Based Reading Instruction for Adolescents, Grades 6–12

This resource is a matrix for higher education professionals to evaluate their evidence-based instruction in reading.

http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IC-13_FINAL_05-26-15.pdf

Selection and Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices

The following, grouped by resource center, are links to resources and tools that can help schools, educators, and institutions of higher education teach and implement evidence-based practices in adolescent literacy.

National Center on Intensive Intervention

This center offers a collection of resources to assist educators as they select and evaluate evidence-based practices for use with adolescents to support academics and behavior.

www.intensiveintervention.org

Academic Progress-Monitoring Tools Chart

www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring

Behavior Progress-Monitoring Tools Chart

www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/behavioral-progress-monitoring-tools

Academic Intervention Tools Chart

www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/instructional-intervention-tools

Behavior Intervention Tools Chart

www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/behavioral-intervention-chart

What Works Clearinghouse

Sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, this resource includes reviews of research on effective interventions to help educators make evidence-based decisions when addressing their classroom, school, or district needs.

www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx

Best Evidence Encyclopedia

Created by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education's Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, this resource provides educators with useful information about programs for students in kindergarten to grade 12.

www.bestevidence.org

Promising Practices Network

This website offers research-based information on what works to improve the lives of children and families. The site allows educators to search by content area and includes issue briefs on up-to-date research findings for service providers.

www.promisingpractices.net

Other Documents

These documents provide useful information on interventions, programs, and effective practices.

Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M. (2008). *Effective instruction for adolescent struggling readers: A practice brief*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research, Center on Instruction.

www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Practice%20Brief-Struggling%20Readers1.pdf

Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A practice guide* (NCEE 2008-4027). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/8

National Institute for Literacy. (2007). *What content area teachers should know about adolescent literacy*. Jessup, MD: EdPubs.

www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/adolescent_literacy07.pdf

Smith-Davis, J. (2009). *Reviews of collections of programs, curricula, practices, policies and tools: Evaluated according to evidence*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network.

<http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/resources/reviews>

Stowe, M. (2014). *Adolescent literacy: Evidence-based instructional strategies. Why, what, and how*. Williamsburg, VA: William & Mary School of Education.

<http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/documents/packets/adolescentreading.pdf>

Torgesen, J. J., Houston, D. D., Rissman, L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., . . . Lesaux, N. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A guidance document from the Center on Instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research, Center on Instruction.

www.centeroninstruction.org/academic-literacy-instruction-for-adolescents-a-guidance-document-from-the-center-on-instruction

Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C. S., & Roberts, G. (2012). *Intensive interventions for students struggling in reading and mathematics: A practice guide*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research, Center on Instruction.

www.centeroninstruction.org/intensive-interventions-for-students-struggling-in-reading-and-mathematics