

Recommendations for Adult Beginning Reading Instruction

Submitted by:
The Practitioner Advisory Group on Reading Instruction
For the NH Bureau of Adult Education
March 8, 2004

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Introduction

In the fall of 2003 the State Office sent out a call to adult education professionals in New Hampshire to come together in order to advise the NH Bureau of Adult Education on an appropriate direction for reading staff development for adult reading instruction at the basic level. Our task was to review current reading instruction in NH Adult Basic Education and best practices. We also were asked to agree on recommended options for reading instruction for adult learners at the following levels: Beginning ABE (0 to 1.9 grade level), Beginning Basic Education (2.0-3.9 grade level), and Low Intermediate Basic Education (4.0 to 5.9 level.)

In addition to this, we were asked to answer the following questions:

- *What assessments or screening—if any—should be carried out in addition to TABE testing?*
- *What activities should take place during a reading instructional session?*
- *Should a specific phonetic program such as Wilson or Lindamood Bell be used for learners with poor phonemic awareness?*
- *Do we recommend particular types of reading materials?*
- *What is an ideal format for reading instruction—time of sessions, frequency, teacher/learner ratio?*
- *What training should teachers have in order to be successful in teaching reading to learners at these levels?*
- *What training would be appropriate for tutors who work with learners at these levels?*
- *If we were to offer a summer institute to help adult educators prepare for ideal reading instruction, what content would be included?*

The following paper represents the work of the adult education professionals who answered the call, the Reading Advisory Group. It represents our research, our experience and our collective learning as we puzzled-out the answers to the above questions. We were asked to complete this task in three, three-hour sessions. Although we stayed on task, we needed a fourth session to finish the job; and certainly we all agreed that we could have met for many more sessions to learn more about the area of how to best teach adult beginning readers. In the end we felt that our work represented a good foundation document about this complicated, and at times controversial area of teaching. However, we were all aware that this paper is just a beginning.

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Best practices in beginning reading instruction:

Our reading advisory group believes a balanced approach to beginning reading instruction represents the best practice. From our research, discussion and experience, we believe that adult beginning reading instruction should include a structured approach to the teaching of all the components of reading which include: phonological awareness, word analysis, spelling, vocabulary, oral reading, fluency, and comprehension. We also recommend that reading and writing be practiced together from the very beginning of the reading instruction process since reading and writing reinforce one another.

Another important feature of best practice in beginning reading instruction is that teachers/tutors read aloud to their students. This single technique helps students to: 1) enlarge their vocabulary and world knowledge, 2) understand the way works of writing are organized, 3) begin the process of formulating their own questions while they read 4) answer teacher's questions about text i.e. main idea, prediction of outcome, 5) practice, with guidance and direct instruction if necessary, in visualizing the spoken and later, the written word.

A third feature of best practice in beginning reading instruction is direct instruction in comprehension strategies from the very start. Beginning reading students should be taught some variation of the "before, during, and after" technique so students realize their prior knowledge allows them to get meaning from what they read. Teachers can ask direct and implicit questions about the text, and they can also teach students how to actively engage in their own questioning process while reading.

At all stages, students should have ample opportunities to read both orally and silently. They should be taught "fix-up" strategies so silent reading is meaningful and pleasurable. In other words, students should also be instructed in methods to redirect their thinking and reading techniques in order to obtain clarity and understanding when they find themselves unable to comprehend what they read.

There is no ideal method of teaching reading for all learners since people learn to read in such a variety of ways. Any technique that utilizes and capitalizes on an adult's life experience enhances the student's motivation and progress in learning to read.

Beginning ABE (0 to 1.9)

A phonemic awareness assessment should dictate the first steps at this stage. If the student(s) has a problem with phonemic awareness (the sounds of the language), then instruction in this area should be included in the first stages of learning to read. If students don't know the names of letters, they need to learn this at this stage too. Letter/sound association (phonics) can then be introduced. This should be done in a systematic rather than random or haphazard way. In systematic phonics instruction the letters and their sounds are introduced in a clearly defined sequence. At this stage not only decoding is taught, but also encoding (spelling) can be taught using the same sequence. The language experience technique can also be beneficial so students can see their own stories emerge into written form. Through this technique, students can generate lists of "sight words." Practicing reading entire pieces of writing is another important component of early reading instruction. During this period of instruction, the major challenge is finding short books or stories appropriate for adults that contain words that provide students with practice in using the specific letter-sound relationships that they are learning.

Beginning Basic Education (2.0-3.9)

Phonics and word analysis skills should continue to be taught, practiced, reviewed and refined. With increasing sight word and decoding ability, reading fluency and comprehension can be further stressed. Students can be taught to be more fluent readers 1) by providing models of fluent reading such as taped books, choral reading, or 'echo " reading; 2) by having students repeatedly read passages as the teacher/tutor offers guidance. Fluency can be assessed informally to ensure that students are making progress. Vocabulary instruction is also an important component, teaching both specific words and word learning strategies. Finding materials that are important and relevant to students' lives is both motivating and empowering. Student discussions about their reading engender higher order thinking skills and enhance comprehension. Students should also be encouraged to read independently outside of the classroom as much as possible.

Low Intermediate Basic Education (4.0-5.9)

Word analysis skills can help develop a larger vocabulary as well as developing the ability to use context clues. Vocabulary development and the direct teaching of comprehension strategies (summarizing, inferential thinking,

making predictions, formulating questions and visualization) are hallmarks of this level. Fluency practice with more difficult texts also increases comprehension. Practice with a variety of genres is important as well as continuation of the students' writing in response to reading. Punctuation rules and grammar instruction make sense for both writing and reading proficiency at this level.

What assessments or screening-if any-should be carried out in addition to the TABE?

Assessment, whether formal, informal or on-going, should drive instruction. The TABE doesn't give us enough information to develop an effective reading program for beginning reading students. It gives us a general idea of a student's silent reading comprehension level but no insight as to why they are scoring low. Therefore, the first step in planning an individual reading program is to assess a student's mastery of the reading components. What we teach depends on what the student's needs are, their strengths and weaknesses, and we can only find that out through assessment. Formally or informally, teachers or tutors should assess phonemics and word analysis, word recognition, spelling, oral fluency, oral vocabulary, and comprehension. A writing sample should also be part of the assessment process.

Some commercially available assessments that measure students' ability in many components of reading include the following tests:

Bader Reading and Language Inventory

Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR)

Basic Reading Inventory

Laubach Way to Reading Diagnostic Inventory

Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory

For additional information about these assessments including price and ordering information please see page 25 of the appendix of this document.

For more information about adult reading instruction and assessment strategies, see the Assessment and Reading Profiles website at www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles

Sylvia Green's Informal Word Analysis, a useful assessment device is available to be downloaded from www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles. Another useful informal assessment is Denise Reddington's mini-grant, ***Basic Informal Reading Inventory***. For copies, call the NH Bureau of Adult Education at 271-6698.

We also offer the following organizational recommendations regarding assessment:

- ❑ Assessment instruments that complement the TABE should be available, but not mandated.
- ❑ Ideally, the classroom teacher should administer additional reading assessments to his/her students.
- ❑ Staff development training on assessment administration and its implications for instruction should be a priority.
- ❑ Additional time should be allotted to programs so testing time isn't taken away from instructional time.
- ❑ Learning disabilities assessments must also continue to be addressed and integrated into any reading program.

What activities should take place during a reading instructional session?

This list is all-inclusive; it can be altered according to the level of competency of the student(s). Lessons and activities should be developed based on formal and informal assessment, teacher observation, and student input. Activities should include lessons that address the following reading components:

Phonemic Awareness: A learner's phonemic awareness should be checked and addressed if needed. This is especially important for very beginning readers.

Phonics and Word Analysis: Direct instruction in phonics and sight words should be part of a reading lesson. Materials could include teacher-made lessons and activities as well as published materials. Word analysis skills include phonics, (sound-symbol relationships), syllabication rules, and the identification of word parts such as prefixes and suffixes.

Spelling and Writing: Spelling and writing activities that correspond to the reading lesson should be included.

Vocabulary: New vocabulary words and discussion of new vocabulary should be included in a lesson whenever possible. Repetition and recycling of new vocabulary are important.

Oral Reading and Fluency: Lessons should include repeated readings, reading for accuracy, and oral reading for fluency. Controlled reading selections should be used and the teacher or tutor should also read aloud to the students.

Comprehension: A student's background knowledge and interests have a huge impact on his/her reading comprehension. Developing appropriate background knowledge prior to reading is an important first step. Comprehension activities include discussions of the text; answering implicit and explicit questions; and direct instruction on skills such as using context clues, monitoring reading, predicting, summarizing, using headings and captions, and visualizing and evaluating

the text. Although controlled and interesting materials written for adults are often used, the adept use of many genres of literature can be beneficial.

Reading instructional sessions should be consistently structured in both the time and the routine of the lesson because students like and respond well to expected, predictable order. Multi-sensory activities, especially involving kinesthetic activity, should be included whenever possible. In day-to-day teaching, all the essential ingredients of reading mix together, and a well-trained teacher takes advantage of teachable moments, while still following a structured lesson plan that keeps recycling skills that need repeated practice.

Should a specific phonetic program such as Wilson or Lindamood Bell be used for learners with poor phonemic awareness?

While practitioners should have access to training in a variety of reading programs, we do not recommend a specific program for adoption. However, we do recommend that any reading program that is chosen be systematic and structured.

Do we recommend particular types of reading materials?

While we have not recommended any particular types of reading materials, we have included a list of materials that we have found to work well in different teaching situations. This list can be found beginning on page 10 of this document.

What is an ideal format for reading instruction—time of sessions, frequency, teacher/learner ratio?

The ideal format for reading instruction would include:

- ❑ A teacher or tutor trained to teach adults to read.
- ❑ The learner has been given a full reading assessment; goals have been set based on that assessment; and strengths and weaknesses have been discussed.
- ❑ A very small teacher/learner ratio, 1 on 1 or very small group of no more than five students.
- ❑ The teacher and learner(s) meet at least twice a week for 1.5 to 2 hours per session. More than twice a week is even better.
- ❑ The student is given independent practice outside of instructional time, and the student reviews and completes assignments between sessions.
- ❑ The teacher or tutor has access to reading assessments and a variety of materials.
- ❑ The teacher or tutor has a support system.
- ❑ The student is involved in lesson planning and assessment.

What training should teachers have in order to be successful in teaching reading?

In an article entitled, "Using Multiple Methods of Beginning Reading Instruction," the International Reading Association has taken this position statement: "There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children [students] to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children [students] in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children [students] they teach." The article closes with this sentence: "To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials."

In light of this statement, we recommend that teachers should have training in reading assessments, and they should also understand reading components (as articulated throughout this paper) and methods to teach them. Teachers should avail themselves of as much information as they can acquire about best practices in reading instruction through coursework, staff development activities, collaboration with their peers, and through their own reading and reflection.

Staff development directed at the teaching of reading should be based on a balanced, yet systematic and structured approach. Any staff development program should be conducted according to research-based best practices. These include on-going opportunities for instruction, reflection, planning for implementation, practice, debriefing, and troubleshooting.

What training would be appropriate for tutors who work with learners at these levels?

Training tutors should be an on-going process. Initially, tutors should be taught about the components of reading and given information to read and assimilate before being assigned to a student. Coordinators must emphasize to the tutors that they themselves should expect to learn a lot about the teaching of reading as they progress with their student. In addition to workshops that cover the basics of teaching reading, tutors need to have access to a single reading program that has very carefully developed teachers' guides that a tutor can follow. This should be accompanied with the opportunity to observe an accomplished teacher. When they are finally assigned to their students, further instruction should be fine-tuned to match the needs of that student(s) based on

his/her reading assessment in all the components of reading. Coordinators should do their best to keep in contact with tutors to get a feel for progress and problems. With good, systematic materials and monitoring, tutors often learn to spot problems and present them to their coordinators for advice and amelioration. Coordinators should avail themselves of as much information as they can acquire through coursework, staff development activities, or their own reading about best practices in reading instruction.

If we were to offer a summer institute to help adult educators prepare for ideal reading instruction, what content would be included?

If there was a summer institute for teaching reading, it should put a strong emphasis on becoming familiar with assessment tools and then planning instruction based on the assessment. To become comfortable and proficient with these techniques, there should be as much "hands-on practice" as possible, even involving students if feasible. Led by professionals in the field of teaching reading, we could learn more about current teaching methodologies of the components of reading. Just as we have learned a great deal through this reading group because of discussions and readings, a summer institute that immersed us in thinking, talking, reading, and teaching reading would make us more competent reading teachers.

We also recommend that a task force for reading instruction be set up. This group could work on the best ways of teaching reading, and then in turn train current and new staff in the best practices thereby becoming an on-going resource to adult education practitioners in New Hampshire.

Selected References

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Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: A Guide to the Research for Reading Professionals, National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) Reading Research Working Group, Washington, D.C., 2001.

Websites

The Adult Reading Components Study at NCSALL

www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles

This website is a goldmine of information about adult reading assessment and instruction. This website is interactive!

LINCS/National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)

<http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/index.html>

The national LINCS (Literacy Information aNd Communication System) site is a project of the [National Institute for Literacy](#) (NIFL). It includes information about NIFL projects and publications, a directory of state and national literacy contacts, factsheets, policy updates, grant and funding announcements, a calendar of events, and information about NIFL-sponsored literacy listservs.

[America's Literacy Directory](#), a searchable database that can be used to find adult education and adult ESL programs around the nation, can also be accessed here.

Literacy Online (National Center on Adult Literacy)

<http://literacy.org/ncal.html>

Publications including newsletters and research reports from NCAL and the International Literacy Institute (ILI). Descriptions of NCAL and ILI projects. Links to national and international sites. (Spanish version of site available.)

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)

<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall>

Features descriptions of research projects, information about the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network, and online versions of research reports and *Focus on Basics* journal.

Center for Applied Linguistics

<http://www.cal.org/>

Publications and searchable directories about foreign and second language education, ESL, dialects and Ebonics, bilingual education, refugee education, language policy and assessment. Home of the [National Center for ESL Literacy Education](#) and the [Cultural Orientation Resource Center](#).

Adult Beginning Reader Guide 2002

<http://www.abeflorida.org/resources.html>

This very comprehensive work includes general information on teaching reading, reading checklists, many pages of classroom activities and much more.

