

Adolescent Literacy
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Preface
Pages i-ii

Goal of the report: immediate need for basic information about how to build adolescents' reading and writing skills.

The report published by the National Institute for Literacy, or NIFL, summarizes some of the current literature on adolescent literacy research and practice.

The report suggests methods of building adolescent reading and writing skills in the classroom and the recommendations are evidence-based.

It is the hope of this report that it will provide educators with useful guidance that can inform what you do in the classroom today.

The National Reading Panel or NRP, guided the topics and shaped the outcome of this report. The basic areas of reading:

- Phonological processing
- Morphology
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Reading comprehension

form the core of the summary contained within this journal.

Within this journal,

- Reading
- Writing
- Morphological skills
- Motivation for reading
- Reading assessment and monitoring
- Diverse learners

are addressed.

To create this document, sources were selected that used scientifically-based research methods, which involved the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education and activities and programs.

Introduction

Pages 1-2

According to the latest research, 8.7 million fourth through twelfth graders struggle with reading and writing tasks that are required of them in school.

For many adolescent learners, their struggles in reading and writing factor into their decisions to drop out of school.

These factors indicate that reading and writing instruction should continue beyond the elementary years and should be tailored to the more complex forms of literacy that are required of adolescent students in the middle and high school years.

A growing research base supports emphasis on direct instruction in reading and writing skills needed to complete the more complex tasks that are required in upper grades of learning.

However, content area teachers are not prepared to do the intensive skills-based instruction that is required for struggling readers and writers, and also meet the criteria of curriculum taught within the set parameters of the course.

Key Literacy Components

Pages 3-26

Key Literacy Components

Research has shown “what you teach” and the “amount of time” you spend teaching it account for the greatest variance in student achievement.

“What you teach” is defined as the content of literacy instruction.

Key literacy components are:

- Decoding/phonemic awareness and phonics
- Morphology
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Text comprehension

The panel group tackling this issue did state that content area teachers should not be focusing on decoding skills within the content area class. If a learner is struggling at this most basic level, intensive intervention by the reading specialist or special education teacher would need to be accessed.

Decoding

Pages 3-8

Decoding, or word identification, is defined as “the ability to correctly decipher a particular word out of a group of letters”.

Two skills involved in decoding or word identification are: phonemic awareness and phonics.

Phonemic awareness is defined as “the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual units of sound”.

These units of sound are called “phonemes”.

Phonemic awareness also includes the ability to identify and manipulate these individual units of sound.

According to the National Reading Panel, direct instruction in phonemic awareness is most beneficial when offered to young children. Phonemic instruction is best if provided in kindergarten and first grade.

If this awareness has not been developed in the early years of reading development, middle and high school students may experience difficulty in “sounding out” words that they are not familiar with.

Phonics is defined as “the understanding of the relationship between the letters in written words and the sounds of these words when spoken”.

Students use this understanding as the basis for learning to read and write.

Phonics helps students to recognize familiar words and decode new ones, providing these students a predictable, rules-based system for reading.

Good readers have a conscious understanding of the individual sounds or phonemes within spoken words and how these sounds are manipulated to form words.

Readers with strong phonics skills are able to use this knowledge to pronounce unknown words.

Researchers have asserted that students who are unsuccessful in reading words that are unfamiliar to them may also struggle with poor phonemic awareness skills.

Without sufficient awareness of the sounds that make new words, adolescent readers are unable to move to other levels of literacy, such as fluency.

Struggling with phonics negatively affects students in other areas:

- reading comprehension skills
- vocabulary knowledge
- reading fluency

Struggling learners with weak phonics skills lack effective strategies for decoding unknown multi-syllabic words.

What is most interesting is that students can have the ability to use multi-syllabic words in their spoken vocabulary, but they are not able to identify them in print.

According to research, at grade five and beyond, students encounter 10,000 or more new words a year in their grade-level and content-area texts, and most of these words are multi-syllabic.

The inability to decode multi-syllabic words negatively influences readers' comprehension and also prevents them from reading grade-level text independently and building their reading vocabularies.

In the area of decoding difficulties for a struggling reader, it is not the function of the content area teacher to remediate this. A reading specialist or special education teacher should be involved in this process.

For your information only, decoding instruction should emphasize:

- Syllable patterns
- Morphology
- Integration of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to develop students' comprehension and use of academic language
- Focus only on one strategy at a time
- Direct, explicit, and systematic instruction for teaching phonemic awareness and phonics
- Allow for extra time to read materials in and out of the classroom due to the labored reading of the struggling learner

What do we need to know about decoding?

Research is needed:

- To study whether or not small group settings are most effective in teaching environment for phonemic awareness for older students.

- To look at the connection between motivation and phonics instruction.
- To determine how decoding and fluency skills relate to reading difficulties faced by older learners.

Morphology

Pages 8-11

Morphology is defined as the "'study of word structure".

Morphology describes how words are formed from morphemes.

Morphemes are defined as "the smallest unit of meaning in a word".

A morpheme can be a single letter, like 's', which would add plurality to a word, or letter combinations, such as roots, prefixes and suffixes.

It is important to note to students when you are looking at what makes up words, that compound words are words that are combined by two words that do not match the meaning of the words separately.

Morphemes can be changed within a word to change the meaning of the word, for example "bakes" to "baked".

The purpose of including morphology in the study of reading is to indicate that good readers who understand words at the morphemic level are better able to get the meaning of words and are better prepared to deal with the increased reading and writing demands across the curriculum and content-area courses.

According to research, students who struggle with the morphology of words will have more difficulty in recognizing and learning words. This is correlated with a student's vocabulary knowledge as well as their reading comprehension.

Instruction in morphology can help students separate out the morphemes into meaningful units for use in decoding, comprehending, or spelling the word.

Research supports six classroom activities that can support the study of morphology.

1. Syllable types and syllable division, which are: closed, open, vowel-consonant-e, vowel pair, vowel-r, consonant-l-e
2. Base words, prefixes, and suffixes
3. Compound words
4. Function words, which are pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and auxiliary verbs
5. Inflections, which change tense, gender, number or person. For example "jump" to "jumped".

6. Derivations, which create new words by changing the grammatical category. For example “jump” to “jumper”.

What do we still need to know?

- Is there a connection between morphological performance in writing to include skills such as spelling and reading?
- Is there a need for more research to explore the role of morphological knowledge in both the transcription as well as the text-generations stages of the writing process?

Fluency

Pages 11-14

Fluency is defined as “the ability to read text accurately and smoothly with little conscious attention to the mechanics of reading.”

Fluent readers read text with appropriate speed, accuracy, proper intonation, and proper expression.

Some researchers have found a relationship between fluency and text comprehension.

Readers must decode and comprehend to gather information from text.

If the speed and accuracy of decoding words are hindered, comprehension of the words is compromised as well.

Struggling readers lack fluency, read slowly, and often stop to sound out words.

They may reread sections of texts to gain comprehension.

Struggling readers may spend so much time decoding, that their focus is drawn away from the comprehension of the text.

Fluency for struggling readers is based on a number of factors:

- Level of difficulty of the text
- The degree of familiarity the reader has with the words, content, and genre of the text
- The amount of practice with the text

Research shows that there are ways to help struggling readers with fluency:

- Practice, practice, practice
- Provide models of fluent reading
- Engage students in repeated oral reading of texts
- Engage students in guided oral reading
- Engage students in partner reading

There are 3 steps to guided reading:

1. Ask individual students to read aloud
2. Guiding them to self-correct when they mispronounce words
3. Asking questions about content to ensure comprehension

There are 5 steps to partner reading:

1. Pair more fluent readers with less fluent readers.
2. Select reading partners carefully considering both compatibility and fluency.
3. Introduce the reading material by reading aloud the first paragraph or two or using selected passages.
4. Inform students that partners are to select different passages to read aloud and then they should both first read each passage silently.
5. Have partners take turns reading aloud to one another.

What do we still need to know?

- How much improvement in reading rate is adequate to improve fluency and comprehension?
- What is the relationship between fluency and accuracy in word recognition?
- What are the effects of oral versus silent fluency instruction?

Vocabulary

Pages 14-18

Vocabulary is defined as “the words that are used in speech and print to communicate”.

Vocabulary can be divided into two groups: oral and print.

Vocabulary knowledge is important to reading because the oral and written use of words promotes comprehension communication.

There are 3 types of primary vocabulary:

- Oral vocabulary
- Aural vocabulary
- Print vocabulary

Oral vocabulary refers to the words that are recognized and used in speaking.

Aural vocabulary refers to the words that are recognized as the collections of words a student understand when listening to others speak.

Print vocabulary refers to words used in reading and writing.

Print vocabulary is more difficult to attain than oral vocabulary because it relies upon quick, accurate, and automatic recognition of the written word.

Vocabulary is categorized as formal or informal.

Academic vocabulary is referred to as the words that are used in formal educational settings.

Academic vocabulary is categorized in 3 areas:

1. High-frequency, everyday words
2. Non-specialized academic words that occur across content areas, such as examine
3. Specialized content-area words that are unique to specific disciplines, such as octagon

Two important skills that are associated with vocabulary development are word identification and word analysis.

Word identification, or decoding, refers to the ability to correctly decipher a particular word out of a group of letters.

Word analysis is defined as the process involved in understanding the letters, sounds, and roots, prefixes, and suffixes that make up words, to enable a student to understand and use those words.

Syntactic awareness or awareness of the grammatical use of a word is included in word identification.

Pragmatic awareness, can be described as the sensitivity to how words are used to communicate, and also to understand the purposes of their use.

Readers that have difficulty with word identification or recognition without comprehension of the meaning and use of a word reveals a deficiency in vocabulary knowledge.

Struggling adolescent readers face many challenges:

- Students with poor or impaired word identification skills
- Difficulty decoding and recognizing multi-syllabic words
- Insufficient vocabulary knowledge can become especially problematic in content area courses
- Inability to comprehend text
- Meanings of many words vary from context to context and from subject to subject

Specific instruction can help students who are struggling;

- Repeated exposures to unknown word meanings
- Independent word-learning strategies, such as using the dictionary
- Context clues
- Pre-teach difficult vocabulary
- Use explicit, direct, and systematic instruction to teach difficult vocabulary
- Use students' prior knowledge and provide opportunities for multiple exposures to new words
- Use computer technology to help teach new vocabulary

What do we still need to know?

- How much professional development is needed to instruct teachers on how to teach vocabulary?
- How should vocabulary instruction be integrated with comprehension instruction?

Text Comprehension

Pages 18- 26

Comprehension is the process of “extracting or construction meaning, (building new meanings and integrating new withhold information) from words once they have been identified”.

Many struggling readers do not have difficulty in reading the words, but in making meaning out of them, and making sense of the information and ideas conveyed by the text.

Comprehension varies on the text being read.

Difficulties with comprehension may result from a readers' unfamiliarity with the content, style, or syntactic structures of the text.

Adolescent readers' who struggle with text comprehension have difficulties in different areas:

- Lack sufficient fluency to achieve comprehension
- Lack comprehension strategies
- Only are able to use strategies within the use of narrative text versus expository text
- They have not learned how to do strategies independently
- They do not know how to transfer strategies from one content area to another
- Limited background knowledge
- Unfamiliar with expository text and the proper strategies to utilize when reading expository text, such as cause/effect, problem/solution and comparison and contrast

Instruction strategies that work with students who are struggling with text comprehension are:

- Integrate text comprehension strategies into instruction
- Generate questions
- Answer questions
- Monitor comprehension
- Summarize text
- Use text structure, such as underlining key words, reading the passages aloud, and explaining clue words to aid comprehension
- Use graphic organizers, which are diagrams or other visuals that help students identify and see the relationships among concepts, ideas, and facts in a text.

- Use semantic organizers or webs or maps, are a type of graphic organizer that uses lines to connect a central concept or main idea with related or supporting facts or ideas.
- Develop critical analysis skills
- Use direct, explicit, and systematic instruction to teach students how to use text comprehension strategies
- Use modeling
- Use guided practice
- Use independent practice and debriefing
- Teach students to use multiple strategies

What do we still need to know?

- Should research focus on investigating the effectiveness of interventions for improving comprehension of specific kinds of text?
- How do you best instruct students to access their prior knowledge?
- Are certain interventions more or less effective with adolescents?
- What kinds of supplemental materials are useful in enhancing content-area instruction in text comprehension?
- What materials would teachers find most helpful to use?

Supporting Literacy Development Through Assessment, Writing, and Motivational Strategies

Pages 27-31

There are 3 related components to literacy instruction:

1. Reading assessment
2. Writing
3. Motivation

Reading assessment

- Effective instruction depends on sound instructional decisions making, which depends on reliable data regarding students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress in learning content and developing literacy.
- Diagnostic assessment is particularly important for struggling readers because it provides teachers with an understanding of the specific skills and strategies these readers can and cannot use.

Summative assessments

- Quizzes
- End-of-chapter tests
- District and statewide tests
- Standardized measures of reading

Purpose of summative assessments

- Inform the teacher if the classroom-level instruction has met the desired effects
- Provide necessary school, district, and state level data

Summative assessments do NOT:

- Inform daily instruction
- Inform daily decision making regarding lesson plans
- Provide information on individual student progress

Formative Assessments are assessments that provide evidence to be used to adapt instruction to meet students' needs

- Teacher observation of students' reading strategies, such as using "think aloud"
- Teacher questioning of the content of the work and the strategies that students are using to gather this information

- Classroom discussion
- Reading of students' work
- Performance assessment

Performance assessment

- Require students to demonstrate the ability to use what they have learned from context texts.
- Simulate tasks or aspects of tasks that will be required of them in higher education, the work place, and civic life
- Typically use prompt that are constructed so that student responses result in complex tasks.
- Rubrics are an example that teachers can use in the class.

Rubrics

- Provide details about different levels of performance
- Teachers can share rubrics with students to help them understand different work levels of performance
- Tell the student how the task will be graded
- Instruct the student in how to achieve standard or superior performance

Challenges with performance assessments

- Assume that students have understood the reading that they are asked to apply in the assessment
- Writing skills may hamper the ability to succeed
- Personal characteristics of the student, such as confidence and self-esteem, influence performance on oral response assessments.
- Student performance is difficult to score reliably

Diagnostic assessments

- Provide teachers with a more precise understanding of individual students' strengths and weaknesses
- Measuring, assessing, and evaluating a students reading abilities
- High quality assent instruments that are reliable, valid, and have the sensitivity and precision to identify individual students' strengths and weaknesses that is useful for planning purposes.

What do we still need to know?

- Studies are needed to establish reliable and valid measurement strategies and instruments to develop well-defined, evidence-based interventions for all literacy-related components.
- Should strategy instruction be assessed by reading achievement or subject matter achievement?

Writing

Pages 31-34

Writing is the “ability to compose text effectively for various purposes and audiences.

Writing is a tool for communication and learning that allows us to document, collect, and widely circulate detailed information.

Writing is a way to express oneself and persuading others.

According to some researchers, improving one’s writing skills improves one’s capacity to learn.

Learning to write well requires instruction.

Grammar and spelling are involved in writing, and are reinforced by reading skills.

Adolescent struggling readers face challenges in the writing process:

- They lack an effective communication and learning tool.
- The inability to write well greatly limits adolescents’ opportunities for education and future employment.
- Teachers use writing to assess the content knowledge of students, so those students who do not write well often suffer academically.
- Students do not possess strategies that allow them to read across disciplines
- They do not possess strategies to navigate them through the reading and writing process.
- They are not self-directed and goal-oriented.
- They do not have self-regulation strategies that allow them to plan, organize and revise their own work independently.
- They do not possess the ability to compose various text genres, such as narrative, persuasive, and descriptive essays.

There are 6 strategies that can be used with students who struggle with the writing process:

1. Use direct, explicit, and systematic instruction to teach writing
2. Directly teach strategies and skills
3. Build upon prior knowledge
4. Teach the students the importance of pre-writing, utilizing brainstorming, outlines, and graphic organizers.

5. Provide a supportive instructional environment for students
6. Use rubrics so that students can clearly understand their areas of strengths and weaknesses.

What do we still need to know?

- Research is needed to understand how best to identify, prevent, and remediate writing difficulties.
- Research is needed to explore the role of the key literacy components in the development of writing.
- Research is needed to investigate how adolescents' beliefs about their writing ability impact the development of their reading ability.

Motivation

Pages 34-37

Motivation involves self-efficacy, or the belief that one is capable of success.

An individual's goals, values, and beliefs regarding the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading affect students' motivations for reading.

Readers are in control of their motivation.

They have goals they are striving to reach by using reading or writing tasks.

Previous successful performance in reading is critical to adolescents' positive sense of self-efficacy in reading and motivation to continue to read.

Motivation for reading contributes to reading engagement.

Engaged readers tend to enjoy reading and to read more frequently.

Reading frequency is related to positive outcomes, including reading achievement.

Motivated readers are able to:

- Be self-determined, by perceiving they have control over their reading and writing tasks, and that they have choices.
- Self-regulate, by being able to direct their reading and writing performance to achieve their goals.
- Be engaged

Students who struggle with motivation face many challenges;

- Experience a change in their beliefs, values, and goals
- Lack motivation in school, but are motivated in other situations to read
- Natural decline in motivation is compounded by the grading and grouping practices prevalent in high school
- Expectations change from mastering a subject or skill to competing with others in the peer group.
- Perceived as less capable due to their groupings in school.
- Confidence in their ability declines.

Instruction can help students who struggle with motivation:

- Teachers can set clear goals and expectations which can help students
- Focus students on their own personal improvement
- Provide a variety of reading materials
- Allowing students to choose reading materials
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss reading and writing tasks with each other.

What do we still need to know?

- Research is needed on the types of cognitive and developmental processes students experience to motivate them to read and write.
- Teachers need a better understanding of the characteristics that they should possess to motivate students at higher levels.

Diverse Learners

Page 38

Teachers need to recognize and understand the differences in students' prior knowledge, skills, and experiences; differences in language or dialect; and differences in cognitive ability.

Teachers need to ensure that students can access their prior knowledge and discuss topics and experiences relevant to what is being discussed in class.

Teachers have to help students make connections to what is being learned in class to their own lives.

Teachers need to build in to their class time additional time for students to process the learning and to make connections.

Teachers need to realize that it is important to validate student responses and ideas.

Conclusion

Page 39

Teachers can help their students learn the reading and writing process by using systematic, explicit, and direct instruction.

Teachers should utilize teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

Strategies must be used and reviewed in different contexts and at different times.

Repetition of a skill contributes to improvement of literacy skills.

Content area teachers must be aware of instructional approaches and strategies that can be used within their existing curricula to help improve the literacy level of the struggling readers they encounter.

Appendix A

Page 49

Think Alouds

Appendix B

Pages 50-54

Sample Graphic Organizers

Appendix C

Pages 55-56

Explicit Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Appendix D

Pages 57-58

Reciprocal Teaching

Appendix E

Page 59

Word Map

Appendix F

Page 60

PLAN and WRITE Strategy

Appendix G

Page 61

Summarization Strategies