

NOTEBOOK

Welcome...

To the first edition of the *Reading First Notebook!*

Teachers, leaders, school systems, and policymakers involved with Reading First need focused information to assist them in the implementation of their Reading First grants. The *Reading First Notebook* will be the place to find that specialized information.

Themed issues will contain pertinent articles and information that address special issues such as assessment, professional development, and instruction for special population students along with links to new resources, articles, and Web sites.

The *Reading First Notebook* will be published on a quarterly basis. It will be accessible online at <http://www.readingfirstsupport.us> and will be available to download in pdf format so that you can print and share it with teachers and leaders in your school system.

We welcome your comments and suggestions related to the *Reading First Notebook*. Please send them to Stacey Joyner at sjoyner@sedl.org.

Enjoy!

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Reading First Levels of Participation As of 12/15/04

1,352 district awards representing
4,630 schools have been made.





Three “Must-Haves” for Early Reading Instruction

Research has identified three elements of an effective early reading program: adequate time, proper assessments, and effective instruction.

Time

Reading First schools are implementing a 90-minute minimum block of instructional time for reading. This focused instructional block ensures that students will receive extended, concentrated lessons that will better support student achievement. This block of teaching must not be interrupted by assemblies, announcements, pullout programs, or special subjects (art, music, P.E.).

In addition to the 90 minutes of focused classroom instruction, students with additional needs (as determined by diagnostic assessments) receive supplemental instruction designed to provide additional support in a small group setting, and/or intensive instruction, for even more explicit and intensive support from the classroom teacher, special education teacher, or reading resource teacher.

For more information on instructional improvement design see the University of Oregon’s Reading Web site at <http://reading.uoregon.edu/logistics/core2.php>.

Assessments

Teachers should have a clear understanding of the many types and functions of reading assessments used in schools everyday in order to effectively measure student readiness, progress, and the need for instructional interventions. Schools should outline a plan for administering each of the following:

- ★ A *screening tool* that will provide information about which students may be at risk of reading failure by measuring abilities on concepts that are predictive of future reading success
- ★ A *diagnostic tool* that can pinpoint specific areas in which a student identified as at-risk may need instructional intervention in order to be successful
- ★ A *progress monitoring tool* that measures skills gained over time so that progress toward a specific grade-level goal can be measured

- ★ An *outcome assessment* that provides evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the reading program

Instruction

The 90-minute block of early reading instruction in Reading First schools is composed of a common core curriculum that supports a broad range of learners. The core curriculum should include strategies and materials that clearly support the five major components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NRP, 2000).

Instructional strategies within the core curriculum are presented in an explicit and systematic manner. Explicit instruction is generally defined as instruction that is deliberate and direct in its approach to teaching reading skills and strategies. It does not rely on the students’ ability to establish concepts independently. Systematic refers to instruction that is provided in a clearly defined sequence. This scope and sequence should be vertically and horizontally aligned and applied by all teachers at the school.

Additionally, the core curriculum should be implemented in a manner in which students are actively engaged and sufficiently challenged.

Instructional leaders should clearly outline expectations in relation to the above elements and monitor classrooms regularly to ensure implementation. In addition, leaders and/or coaches should be available to provide the necessary support and professional development to ensure increased competency in these areas.

References:

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Development.

Resources

Reading First Technical Assistance Centers



In an effort to assist school systems that have received Reading First funds, the U.S. Department of Education has established a National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance. The center provides free training and technical support to schools implementing Reading First.

Three regional centers will provide assistance. The regional centers are operated by Florida State University, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Oregon.

Technical assistance varies but may include training in scientifically based reading research and instruction; training in using assessment data to improve student reading performance; assistance in reviewing reading programs and assessments; and critique

of Reading First sub-grant applications and scoring rubrics.

Dissemination methods include national and regional conferences, seminars, and institutes; focused professional development; on-site, e-mail or telephone consultations; and links to reading experts.

Feel free to contact your regional support center for more information:

Florida State University
Florida Center for Reading Research
227 North Bronough Street
Suite 7250
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-644-9352

The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Reading and Language Arts
College of Education
SZB228/D4900
1 University Station
Austin, TX 78712
512-232-1901

University of Oregon
Center on Teaching and Learning
College of Education
5292 University of Oregon
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What About Developmentally Appropriate Instruction?

By Sebastian Wren

The term “developmentally appropriate” is one of the most often misused terms in reading instruction. Sometimes teachers with good intentions argue that it is not developmentally appropriate to teach “academic” skills like reading to young children. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it is vitally important to teach reading skills to young children as soon as it is possible to do so. However, it is important to teach those reading skills in a developmentally appropriate manner.

When reading instruction is postponed for some children, they tend to fall behind their peers very rapidly. The children who started developing reading skills at a young age very quickly build on those skills and leave their less-fortunate peers behind. This phenomenon is called the “Matthew Effect” (Walberg & Tsai, 1983), and it is one of the most destructive forces in education. Research in the Matthew Effect has shown that the children who started developing reading skills at a young age tend to become proficient readers who are fairly successful in

school overall, while the children who are more delayed in developing reading skills tend to have long-lasting difficulties with reading in particular and with school in general (Stanovich, 1986).

A small gap in pre-school or kindergarten, if ignored, becomes an enormous and frustrating gap by third grade. Teachers of young children must not ignore that gap. They must give students who are a little slow to develop reading skills extra time, extra attention, and, most importantly, extra instruction to help them

catch up with their peers. However, the key is to provide that instruction in a developmentally appropriate manner. Children in pre-school and kindergarten often have difficulty sitting still and working at their desk for long periods of time, so it is not appropriate to give children in those grades large amounts of “busy work” that must be completed at their desks. While instruction needs to explicitly focus on specific reading skills, children at this age need more interactive stimulation, and lessons need to feel more like games than work. Explicit instruction can take many forms, including games.

At this age, songs can be used to help children develop rhyme and phoneme awareness. Writing can be taught in group activities. Phonics and vocabulary can be enhanced through role-playing games. It is not sufficient to merely play these games and go through the motions

of these activities, however. Merely singing the song “Apples and Bananas” does not magically teach all children phoneme awareness. The teacher must explicitly emphasize the teaching objective while keeping the activity fun, engaging, and developmentally appropriate.

To learn more about this topic, visit the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Web site at <http://www.naeyc.org>. Also, there is a very informative section on early reading instruction at the Reading Rockets Web site at <http://www.readingrockets.org/lp.php?CID=11>.

References:

Stanovich, K. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360–406.

Walberg, H., Tsai, S. (1983). Matthew effects in education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20(3), 259–373.

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