

INFORMATION SHARING SESSION OCTOBER 11, 2004 SESSION ?

PRESENTATION BY DR. ELIZABETH G. STURTEVANT

Improving Reading for Young Adolescents with Disabilities

Who is an adolescent? An adolescent is any individual between the ages of 10 and 19 years. According to the 2000 United States Census, there are 40,747,962 adolescents in the United States, noted Dr. Elizabeth G. Sturtevant from George Mason University. They come from diverse families, communities, and schools; they also have individual and cultural differences. In terms of reading achievement, the 2002 NAEP results indicated that 8th grade reading scores for White, African-American, and Hispanic youth increased between 1992 and 2002, although 12th grade scores decreased (NCES, 2003).

Dr. Sturtevant stated that although these statistics are generally encouraging, we still must be concerned about adolescent reading skills, especially since demands are increasing for post-secondary education and employment in the current “information age” (Alvermann, 2002). As a result, adolescents must become more sophisticated readers of many types of texts (IRA/NMSA, 2002). A lot of students start to have difficulty in grade 4, most likely because of the dramatic change in reading aptitude needed at this grade.

Dr. Sturtevant introduced *Principled Practices for Adolescent Literacy*, which was developed to guide educators and policymakers in effective instruction. The team¹ wanted to describe what is similar across successful classrooms, so they identified successful classrooms and then visited and observed them. Based upon these observations, the team came up with the following eight principles that guide adolescent success in literacy:

1. Adolescents need active learning environments that offer clear and facilitative literacy instruction. Teachers need to be prepared to help students engage in, and understand the reading.
2. Adolescents need respectful environments characterized by high expectations, trust, and care. A positive environment is an environment in which students learn more effectively.
3. Adolescents need opportunities to engage with both print and nonprint texts for a variety of purposes. Teachers’ expectations should match the student’s ability level and should be geared toward student needs. For example, teachers can provide students with opportunities

¹ The author team included Donna Alvermann (University of Georgia), Fenice Boyd (University of Buffalo), William Brozo (George Mason University), Kathleen Hinchman (Syracuse University), David Moore (Arizona State University-West), and Elizabeth Sturtevant (George Mason University). The team of consultants for the project included Patricia Anders (University of Arizona), Thomas Bean (University of Nevada), Judith Irvin (Florida State University), Gay Ivey (James Madison University), Elizabeth Moje (University of Michigan), Richard Vacca (Kent State University), and George Hruby (University of Georgia). Support for the project was provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and all participating universities.



to engage with electronic text if that interests the students and is appropriately matched to their ability levels.

4. Adolescents need opportunities to generate and express rich understandings of ideas and concepts. Students need to speak and write with each other and be part of a community.
5. Adolescents need opportunities to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and learning. It is important that students enjoy the reading activities that teachers provide, because students have to do a lot of reading in order to be a good reader; the better they get, the more they will want to learn and read on their own.
6. Adolescents need opportunities to assess their own reading and learning in order to direct their future growth. Teachers still need to assess students and then guide their instruction by the results, but students should also be forced to think about their own learning, and become more meta-cognitive. Teachers can provide opportunities for continual self-assessments, like allowing students to listen to recordings of themselves reading aloud at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to gauge their progress.
7. Adolescents need opportunities to connect reading with their lives and their learning inside and outside of school. Teachers can help themselves and their students by becoming acquainted with their students lives outside of school, and connecting those experiences to reading.
8. Finally, adolescents need opportunities to develop critical perspectives toward what they read, view, and hear. Teachers need to encourage students to use reading in their own lives and to empower students not to accept everything they read as truth without questioning it critically.

Dr. Sturtevant then reviewed the first of several case examples that demonstrate some of the good things happening in classrooms.

School Example #1: *This school was studying the industrial revolution. Teachers in math, science, English, social studies, special education, and ESL collaborated to facilitate a 7th grade project in which students became part of an assembly line that made toys for disadvantaged children. A committee of teachers and students was set up at the beginning of the project. Students were asked what job they would like to have on the assembly line. Some students were assigned as supervisors to ensure that safety rules were being followed and production was occurring at an appropriate rate. Reflective writing was included on what it felt like to participate in an assembly line. Toys were delivered to the community after their production.*

After describing the middle school project, Dr. Sturtevant introduced the importance of strategies in instruction. Teachers not only need to know strategies that will assist every student in the classroom to read, but they also need thorough education on these strategies. According to a recent Rand report, students need to learn a repertoire of strategies that are imbedded in subject area instruction (Snow et al., 2002). Students do not always know how to connect a strategy they used in one class to another class. If teachers work across disciplines and use the same strategies, they will serve struggling students better.



Students that have problems in reading tend not to use the “self-questioning” strategy. That is, they tend not to ask themselves if the content makes sense while they are reading it. Instead, they just want to finish the assignment.

Another strategy that should be used with and taught to struggling readers is the use of graphic organizers. This strategy needs to be explicitly taught and broken down, as kids may not be able to get themselves organized right away. Teachers can create part of the organizer and explain their thought process as they do so. The focus should be on “catching” ideas and then seeing how they fit together. Students should then be able to practice putting together a graphic organizer. The skill of outlining can also be taught using a graphic organizer. An organizer can make sure the ideas make sense and are appropriate ones to be included in an outline.

Adolescents who struggle with literacy often think that good writers do not need to organize their thoughts before writing. Therefore, it is helpful to point out that good writers also use these strategies.

Summarizing is another strategy with which students often struggle. It is a difficult skill and needs to be taught explicitly, starting with short passages of text. Instead, teachers often have students write summaries without teaching the skill, under the assumption that they know how to summarize. This can lead to students simply copying information. However, if students are taught how to summarize and what to look for, they can gain greater comprehension of the text.

Another important strategy for struggling readers is to be able to identify text structures. Teachers should expose students to different text structures and model how to approach different types of text.

***School Example #2:** In a summer program serving 6th graders with serious difficulties in reading and writing, graduate students served as tutors. Each elementary student had his/her own tutor. Tutors asked the students what they wanted to study and work on, and the students were motivated to study their topic because they chose it. Some of the topics students chose were family heritage, sports, animals, and cooking. The tutors worked on strategies and skills within each project, and found instruction to be effective because the students were so motivated by their topics. Students and tutors also worked on other activities, such as reading, and computers were available for students to use to access needed material.*

***School Example #3:** In this 8th grade classroom, which served students both with and without disabilities, a theme was chosen every year. In this example, the theme was volunteerism. Students had to pick a service volunteer to interview. The students were taught how to do historical research and how to conduct and then transcribe the interviews. The transcriptions were analyzed by the students to find similarities among the volunteers interviewed, as well as the positives and negatives of being a volunteer. Students conducted and shared the activity in their community.*

Dr. Sturtevant concluded her presentation with a summary of the main points:

- Teachers at the middle school and high school levels need to talk to each other, because students are traveling between multiple classrooms.
- Teachers need to concern themselves with the level of textbooks to which students are exposed. Students also need support accessing text such as audiotapes, and support from special education teachers or graphic organizers. Students cannot be denied the opportunity



to learn from these texts. Additionally, students need to be able to read text at their reading level that is interesting and enjoyable. This will allow students to be engaged in fluent reading of text. This practice in reading will help students grow as readers.

- Teachers need to take courses in reading strategies and plan together to provide a unified effort.
- Teachers need to monitor the interest level of their students in the material they are covering.
- Teachers should connect reading to purposeful activities for the students.

Seven Final Notes

1. Adolescents with disabilities are similar to other adolescents.
2. Adolescent students with disabilities need extra support and instruction.
3. All students need to learn to read and use multiple types of texts for multiple purposes.
4. Students who struggle with reading need support for reading difficult texts, and they need texts they can read easily.
5. Teachers of all subjects need to explicitly teach reading strategies within their content areas.
6. Engagement and motivational issues must be taken seriously.
7. Literacy improves when used for real purposes in the school, home, and community.

FACILITATED DISCUSSION

State Reading Initiatives

Washington

The state has developed *K–10 Grade Level Expectations* for reading, which includes research-based strategies that encompass essential academic learning requirements. A manual has been developed for standards-based IEPs. Washington would like the Access Center to review the manual before it is disseminated. The three-tiered model is covered on the Web site: www.k12.wa.us. Graphic organizers and a list of supplemental reading programs are available on this Web site as well. The target students for these materials are tier 2 and 3 students.

Kentucky

The state's Reading First Grant trains all teachers, including special education teachers, on the five essential components of effective reading instruction. The Universal Design Learning project focuses on getting technology into the schools, providing students with access to the curriculum, and providing an accessible assessment for students. Students have been tested online using familiar technology. The Kentucky Assessable Continuum Consortium was developed to put all texts in PDF format so everything in the PDF matches the textbook exactly. The digital text network was established so textbooks could be scanned and read to students. The database can be reviewed for assessable digital formats available. Student participation has increased due to these programs. Students with disabilities are allowed to have text read aloud to them during high stakes testing.

Pennsylvania

The state conducted a randomized assignment pilot of computerized assessment in mathematics last spring. This was not implemented for reading because they did not feel they could have the text read to students.

Ohio

The state has started focusing on middle grades and the teaching of reading. Workshops will be provided to middle school teachers, and training will be provided to personnel at correctional facilities. Reviews of schools are occurring to gain understanding of progress gains. Ohio is also using the SIRI program as part of its reading initiative, as well as Battelle for Kids, which uses data analysis to see where students are not achieving. The Ohio Department of Education is also working more collaboratively with the Board of Regents to train teachers, particularly in the middle grades, and is redoing its certification requirements.



Challenges and Implementation Issues That Relate to These Initiatives or Promising Practices

Ohio is concerned about students who are struggling in the general education classroom, but do not qualify for special education.

California indicated that students who need support, but do not qualify for special education services can receive support from the resource specialist and resource room. Collaboration between a special education teacher and general education teacher occurs and services can be provided. Collaborative models are available through Bill Tollestrup's resources on "never streaming" at www.calstat.org.

Louisiana is struggling with the fact that IEPs address the student's functional level, but not their goals on grade level curriculum. Given the future of high stakes assessments, this does not seem to meet these students' needs. Research on how to close the achievement gap is needed. Information on alternative assessments is needed.

North Carolina's alternative academic assessment inventory is available for students in special education. The inventory has been accepted into the NCLB state plan. Students are promoted based on passing specific measurements, and this inventory can be used as one of these measurements. The inventory can be found at www.ncpublicschools.org. This assessment is not for the 1% of students allowed to take an alternative assessment; there is a separate assessment for that group of students. After three attempts, North Carolina has also received a Reading First grant. There was dichotomy at the state level about what should be happening in reading instruction.

Susan Skipper from the Access Center provided information on Professional Learning Communities and on the pyramid of interventions. Rick DuFour and Adlai Stevenson High School (Lincolnshire, IL) are good resources.

Steve Fleishman of the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center added that a good program should provide professional development for teachers on effective instruction.

Other Supports Needed:

- Support to bridge the transition period; a guidance document to acknowledge the many students who are not fluent readers at the secondary level
- Fluency probes for middle and high school
- Resources to teach middle and high school students how to read
- A research-based continuum of effective reading resources that documents what reading programs should be tried with students struggling to read
- Literacy coaches to work with teachers to assist with adjusting the curriculum
- Teacher preparation for middle and high school teacher candidates

Resources:

- Louisa Cook Moates' reading research evidence at www.sopriswest.com



The Access Center

Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8

- Information on the three-tiered intervention model can be found on Washington state's web page: www.k12.wa.us
- Bill Tollestrup's "never streaming" resources at: www.calstat.org
- North Carolina's alternative academic assessment inventory is available at www.ncpublicschools.org
- Guided tours of the Access Center Web site are available by contacting any of the Access Center staff: www.k8accesscenter.org
- Education Week has synthesized the efficacy of Reading Recovery. For more information on Reading Recovery, it may also be useful to look at Success for All schools/districts.