

Introduction

We will never teach all of our students to read if we do not teach our students who have the greatest difficulties to read. Another way to say this is: Getting to 100% requires going through the bottom 20%.

—Torgesen (2006, p. 1)

More than twenty-five years ago, effective schools guru Ron Edmonds (1981) said the following:

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all students whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't done it so far. (p. 53)

Although Edmonds was writing in a broad sense about student achievement, his statement aptly describes the current state of affairs in reading. Today, more educators than ever before are feeling empowered to teach *all* children to read. They are working collaboratively to build collective efficacy and instructional capacity in their schools. They have moved beyond personal feelings of doubt to become energised by the success of their students. My optimism about the possibilities of teaching all students to read is bolstered by a body of experimental intervention research carried on since the 1980s. However, we must be very clear about what *all* means when we commit to teaching them all to read. According to Torgesen (2002), although “intensive preventive instruction can bring the average word-reading skills of children at risk for reading disabilities solidly into the average range, even under the best-known instructional conditions, a substantial proportion of children (6 per cent) will remain relatively impaired in word-level reading skills at the conclusion of the intervention” (p. 96). Some students will not respond to the very best we have to offer in our classrooms. However, because you and your colleagues cannot be sure which students are having serious reading difficulties that do not respond to intensive and specialised interventions until you intervene, you have a moral imperative to teach all children using research-based instructional methods from their first enrolment in your school or classroom. Meanwhile, you must maintain a firm belief that all of your students will learn to read until you see solid data that show that they can't. This approach to teaching reading is similar to the measures taken by the best physicians when they are confronted with seriously ill patients. Dedicated doctors do not give up until they have exhausted all of their treatment options. We can do no less for our students at risk.

Teaching them all to read is a highly complex undertaking that requires the skilful management of time, data, instructional programs and human resources at levels previously unseen in many primary schools. It also requires knowledgeable and passionate school leaders, highly effective teachers, high-quality embedded professional development and a school culture that *expects* all students to succeed and provides multiple opportunities for those students to learn (McEwan, 2008, 2009).

The 40 intervention strategies in this book are designed to maximise your instructional effectiveness with struggling students. They can be used in two ways: (1) in whole-group instruction if you are working in a very low-performing school with many disadvantaged students, or (2) in small intervention groups as a supplement to the whole-group instruction you are providing during your core reading lesson.

You will find there are several ways to organise the classroom or school to provide highly effective initial instruction in a large group setting combined with small-group interventions—both in and out of the classroom—with various specialists (for example, speech pathologists, reading teachers or special education teachers).

As you skim the tables of contents, you may find that some of the interventions are similar to what you are already doing. However, if you examine them more closely, you might discover some subtle differences:

1. Instruction is meant to be delivered in small groups.
2. Students are more directly and explicitly taught.
3. More built-in practice and review routines are provided.
4. You are expected to build more modelling and thinking aloud into your instruction.
5. A variety of presentation techniques, such as signalling and choral response, are provided to ensure that students are engaged and on task during instruction. These strategies are meant to provide increased opportunities to learn and to close the gap between students at risk and their more advantaged counterparts, but they are not enough by themselves. Although the interventions are based on solid research, they still need the magic touch of talented teachers to bring them to life in the classroom and to tweak them here and there to meet the students' needs. Your success at implementing these interventions depends on several variables:
 - Your willingness to differentiate classroom instruction to provide what students at risk need: differentiated, explicit, systematic, supportive instruction
 - The effectiveness of your assessments in diagnosing what types of interventions students need
 - The level of your expectations for students
 - The alignment between the intervention and your assessment tools in terms of assessing a student's response to the intervention
 - The amount of time you are willing to devote to teaching and practice
 - Your skill at using the various research-based presentation techniques
 - Your ability to motivate and energise students who may be discouraged and frustrated by their failure
 - The degree to which you are able to collaborate with your administrators and colleagues to implement a strategy across a year level or even schoolwide

Background Knowledge

The teaching moves described in figure 1.2 include both teacher-centred moves (such as explaining, giving directions and reminding) and student-centred moves (such as constructing meaning, motivating-connecting and facilitating). The teacher-centred and student-centred instructional paradigms are not mutually exclusive. Both behaviourist and cognitive teaching models are essential in every classroom. However, when considering how to design instruction for struggling students, it is important to be aware of the special needs of students at risk and consider differentiated, explicit, systematic and supportive instruction as the most effective way to teach them all to read.

How to Design Lessons for Intervention Groups

As you design lessons for intervention groups, keep in mind that what is working for your average and above-average students may not create a climate of success for your struggling students. For example, suppose you have a small group of students who seem unable to grasp the concept of *main idea*. Think about how your original lesson may have missed the learning target for your struggling students. You may not have provided a clear definition of what a main idea is or modelled numerous times how to identify it. Perhaps you assumed that by year four or five, students knew how to find a main idea, so you gave an abbreviated lesson. Maybe you quickly mentioned “getting the gist”, demonstrated with only one example that was ambiguous at best, expected only the most advanced students to answer your questions for fear of embarrassing your struggling students, and then assigned a year-level worksheet that was inaccessible to your students at risk and ESL students. Chances are, these struggling students lost you at the very beginning. Don’t consider their blank stares a personal criticism of your teaching; you just have to make the lesson easier for everyone to understand.

Figure 1.5 shows a sample first lesson for teaching *main idea*. Note how carefully the teacher selects her words, how simple and student-friendly the definitions are, and how often the teacher expects students to simply repeat or write down something that is important to remember. The lesson contains repetition and choral responding to keep students engaged, and there is absolutely no extraneous teacher talk to confuse students. Second-language learners or students with reading disabilities can readily follow the lesson format and become more familiar with new vocabulary each time a choral response is required. Note also that the passage is easy to understand. Many of the intervention strategies in this book are based on similar lesson designs in which students are provided with increased opportunities to learn through teacher modelling and thinking aloud, unison responses to practise new learning and the teacher’s high expectations. This is just the first in a series of main idea lessons, and it explains how to identify the main idea when it is not explicitly stated in the text. After several opportunities to write a main idea sentence with this type of short article, the teacher will transition to short stories in which the main idea is explicitly stated.

Sample Lesson for Teaching Main Idea

The upcoming sample lesson—as well as all of the sample lessons in this book—is designed to be used with a small intervention group that is struggling to keep up with the whole-group lessons in the core program. However, there may be some instances when your whole class could benefit from an intervention, and the sample lessons can be used that way as well. This lesson illustrates many of the presentation techniques described in figure 1.3.

INTERVENTION 3

Practising Beyond Perfection (Years P–6)

It is difficult to overstate the value of practice. For a new skill to become automatic or for new knowledge to become long-lasting, sustained practice, beyond the point of mastery, is necessary.

—Willingham (2004)

This preventive intervention shows you how to design and deliver instruction in a primary classroom using differentiated learning centres and teacher-taught intervention groups. The goal of this *preventive* intervention is to provide the amount and type of practice that readers at risk require to become skilled readers.

Background Knowledge

Perhaps you have never thought of *practice* as an intervention. However, as Willingham (2004) reminds us in the epigraph, we vastly underestimate the amount of practice that many of our students at risk need to become skilled readers. Unfortunately, core (basal) programs do not provide nearly enough practice (opportunities to learn) for reading disabled or ESL students or students at risk. Typically after a skill is introduced, the teacher's guide assumes mastery and moves on to new material. Often the new skill may not reappear in another lesson for a week or more.

The students targeted for the Practising Beyond Perfection intervention need more intensive and immediate practice when a new skill is introduced. For example, when teaching *main idea* as shown earlier in figure 1.5, provide students with at least three opportunities daily to answer main idea questions, write a summary of a story or an article, or choose a title for a short story they have read each day for about three weeks (Carnine, Silbert, & Kame'enui, 1997). In highly effective schools where all students attain year level by the end of year three (95–98 per cent), recursive teaching and practise to beyond perfection are built into every school day (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2004, 2007; McEwan, 2008).

Effective primary teachers have always recognised the importance of practice but too frequently have relied on parents to provide it. Students at risk, however, may or may not have available and knowledgeable parents. That doesn't mean you should give up on reaching out to parents with expectations, training and encouragement for them to work with students at home. However, these students are largely dependent on you for the kind of intensive, daily practice with skills like segmenting, blending and decoding that they need to become skilled readers. It takes a special kind of teacher to design differentiated centres that keep students engaged at their appropriate levels in meaningful practice, while at the same time conducting small intervention groups for those students who need a little boost to stay on track. It takes “someone who is on top of, tuned in to, aware of and in control of three critical facets of classroom life: (1) the management and organisation of the classroom, (2) the engagement of the students and (3) the management of time” (McEwan, 2002, p. 48). Such a teacher can preview, project and predict

Figure 4.1 Sample lesson for teaching a transition routine.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Lesson Objective | Students will be able to return to their desks when they leave the computer centre or rug with no noise and in less than five seconds. |
| Advance Organiser | Teacher Says: Boys and girls, today we're going to learn how year twos return to their desks when they leave the computer centre or the rug. |
| I Do It: Teacher Models—Part I | <p>Teacher Says: What would happen if I weren't careful and ran to my desk?</p> <p>Teacher Does: Model the nonexample by showing students what it <i>doesn't</i> look like and then discuss some of the outcomes with students: It wouldn't be polite; it wouldn't be safe; someone could get hurt.</p> <p>Teacher Says: That's why it's important to learn a better way. Let me show you.</p> <p>Teacher Does: Stand up and without talking or touching anyone, go to sit at his or her desk.</p> <p>Teacher Says: Think about what you saw.</p> <p>Teacher Does: Go back and discuss with students what they observed: It was quiet. The teacher walked. Everyone was safe.</p> |
| You Do It: One Student Models | <p>Teacher Says: Andy, will you show everyone how you can stand up and, without talking or touching anyone, walk straight to your desk?</p> <p>Teacher Does: Compliment Andy as he models, and bring everyone's attention to the key points that have already been mentioned (and any others that are pertinent).</p> |
| You Do It: More Students Model | <p>Teacher Says: Brianna and Chris, will you show everyone how you can stand up and, without talking or touching anyone, walk straight to your desks from the rug?</p> <p>Teacher Does: Compliment them as they model and comment on the key points.</p> |
| You Do It: Small Group Models | <p>Teacher Says: Table Group 1, show us how you can stand up and, without talking or touching anyone, walk straight to your desks.</p> <p>Teacher Does: Again compliment them as they model and reinforce the important points.</p> |
| You Do It: Whole Class Models | <p>Teacher Says: You are doing a terrific job. Now let's see if the rest of you can do it as quietly as the others did. Stand up and, without talking or touching anyone, walk straight to your desks.</p> <p>Teacher Does: Practise it here, although the whole group would rarely leave the rug at once to avoid unnecessary traffic jams.</p> |
| Feedback | Teacher Does: Provide specific feedback to teach and/or correct behaviour, and is enthusiastic and positive. If someone doesn't follow the procedure correctly, the teacher assumes that he needs more practice. |
| Practice | Teacher Does: Repeat the preceding steps (all or part) each time the routine is used until it is mastered. The teacher repeats the preceding steps occasionally throughout the year to review, for consistency, and when new students are in the class. The teacher also playfully practises the routine with a stopwatch to determine students' best time. |
| Reflections | <p>Teacher Does: Choose an appropriate group time to reflect with students about the routine and remind them of the reason for the routine.</p> <p>Teacher Says: Who remembers why we need a routine for going to our desks from the rug? Is it working?</p> <p>Teacher Does: Discuss and listen for suggested improvements from students.</p> |

Source: Adapted from McEwan, 2004.