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*Reproducible pages are in italics.*

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# INTRODUCTION

Long ago, before we knew each other, we both experienced firsthand how important a good principal can be to a school's instructional program. In our fourth (Pat) and first (Jim) year of teaching, we found ourselves in fortunate circumstances: working under the guiding and supportive hand of a leader who saw both teachers and students as people and learners. Jessie Moon of W. T. Moore Elementary School in Tallahassee, Florida, and Paul Braden of South Pittsburg Elementary School in South Pittsburg, Tennessee, were instrumental in helping us become better teachers, in part, because of the vision they shared with us of what a good school looks and feels like.

Many years have passed since then, but we have continued to benefit from time spent in schools with effective principals. As university professors who have had our students intern regularly in classrooms, and as consultants who have worked with hundreds of schools to help them improve their literacy instruction, we have been privileged to watch many principals lead their schools to significantly improve the teaching of reading.

We have written this book for principals who desire to provide the leadership for their school's reading program or are already doing so. The approach we have taken stands on two feet—one set on a large body of research and professional experience in reading; the other set on what we have learned from helping teachers and schools improve their reading programs. We hope you will find this book to be a tool that helps you elevate the teaching of reading in your school, not just a book *about* reading.

In every school, there are individual teachers who provide excellent literacy instruction to all their students. To have effective reading instruction in every classroom, however, requires a schoolwide emphasis on literacy and someone to lead that effort. If you are a principal, assistant principal, curriculum coordinator, reading specialist, or literacy coach, and it is your job to ensure that your school provides effective reading instruction, we wrote this book for you. In the remaining chapters of the book, you will discover what research, experience, and common sense tell us about effective reading instruction and how it translates to best practice.

Chapter 1 focuses on the big picture and what is known about the current state of reading instruction. We explain why reading is considered one of the most complex acts people engage in and how we believe failing to acknowledge this complexity was one reason for the failure of Reading First. Chapter 1 also provides a brief overview of the research on what constitutes effective reading instruction and why this instruction must be carried out in the context of a nurturing, supportive classroom environment. How assessment can hinder or promote good

instruction and how the school schedule affects literacy instruction are two other big ideas in chapter 1 that relate to all aspects of effective reading programs.

Chapter 2 is on comprehension because comprehending what you read is what reading is all about. The chapter begins by describing three roadblocks that commonly get in the way of good comprehension instruction. Then it gives you some specific indicators of good comprehension instruction to look for as you look at instruction, lesson plans, and schedules. Finally, it contains the most important information in this book—a list of resources you can use to help your school improve its comprehension instruction.

When we were first asked to write this book, we were reluctant to take it on because we knew there would not be enough space to provide the level of detailed information schools need to carry out state-of-the-art instruction in all the components of reading. (We also knew that even if we had enough page space, few administrators who are responsible for the total curriculum as well as everything else that comprises a school would have time to read a 500-page book!) What good would it do to write a book that helped leaders identify problems and then not provide enough detail so these problems could be addressed? Fortunately, we hit on the idea of including in each chapter a list of books and articles with detailed descriptions and lesson templates that matched the effective instruction we had suggested and that enabled teachers to overcome the roadblocks. This idea came to us just before we left for the International Reading Association national convention in Orlando. At that meeting, we both spent hours in the exhibits looking for resources. Only when we had enough practical resources to provide the rich detail to allow teachers to implement the kind of instruction we advocated did we agree to write this book. If you decide that improving comprehension instruction is a priority in your school, form study groups and use these resources to plan for and implement more effective comprehension instruction.

Because meaning vocabulary knowledge is highly associated with comprehension, it is the focus of chapter 3. In fact, if we know how many of the key words in a text a reader has appropriate meanings for, we can make a good prediction of how well that reader will comprehend that text. We describe roadblocks to and indicators of effective vocabulary instruction. If you decide that improving meaning vocabulary instruction is a priority in your school, you will find the practical, targeted resources for vocabulary study groups very useful.

Chapter 4 focuses on strategies for helping students become better readers of the informational texts they encounter in science and social studies. Most of the reading your students will do in high school and college will consist of informational texts; children who have experienced a steady diet of stories only are often unprepared for the reading demands of academic subjects. The Common Core State Standards acknowledge the importance of informational text by including separate standards for informational text as well as separate standards for reading in academic subject areas.

Phonics is the focus of chapter 5. Phonics instruction is critical for success in reading; however, in the early grades, you have to make sure that phonics is part of a comprehensive

reading program that also includes vocabulary and comprehension. You also have to ensure that phonics instruction continues through the upper grades when students need to be taught how to use morphology—roots, suffixes, and prefixes—to decode, spell, and build meaning for the multisyllabic words that make up the bulk of new words students encounter from third grade on.

Many people consider fluency to be the bridge between decoding and comprehension. Fluent reading is reading with appropriate phrasing and expression. In chapter 6, you will find the most blatant example of how assessment can hinder good instruction. In many schools, fluency is measured only by speed, the number of words a student can read correctly in one minute. In this chapter, we describe ways to adapt fluency assessments so that they actually measure fluency as well as strategies for building fluency, and we provide resources for fluency study groups.

The biggest determinant of how well your students read is how much they read. Simply stated, the more you read, the better you read. Children who like to read read more than children who only read when required to. The two activities that have been shown to build intrinsic motivation for reading—teacher read-aloud and independent reading in materials of your own choosing—are the subject of chapter 7.

One striking feature of the most effective teachers is that their classrooms have unusually high levels of engagement and motivation. The three major roadblocks to motivation and engagement, ways to overcome these roadblocks, and study group resources to help teachers increase motivation and engagement in their classrooms are the topics of chapter 8.

Chapters 2 through 8 are focused on how to provide comprehensive, multifaceted literacy instruction in all classrooms. All children benefit from a strong classroom program, but it is particularly important for struggling readers and English learners. In chapter 9 you will find effective ways to provide extra beyond-the-regular-program support to your struggling readers and English learners.

Each chapter from 2 through 9 begins by discussing the roadblocks schools may face in that part of the reading program. Next, the chapter details what you should look for to assess how effectively your school is providing instruction in that area. The final section lists resources we have carefully chosen to help your teachers work together to increase the quality of their instruction in that area if you determine that is a priority in your school.

Finally, we would like to suggest how you might read this book. Begin with the assumption that, in reading instruction as in everything else, no school is perfect! As you read the chapters and carry out your observational research, consider how well your school's instruction matches the best practices described in each chapter. Look at your school's comprehension and vocabulary instruction during the reading instructional time as well as in the curriculum areas of science and social studies. Look at how phonics and fluency instruction are included as parts of a comprehensive program and at how fluency is being assessed. Determine the

state of teacher read-aloud and independent reading and consider how motivated and engaged your students are in all aspects of reading. Look at the “extra” instruction your struggling readers receive and determine if it is targeted to their needs and truly extra—in *addition to* rather than *instead of*. When you feel you have the big picture of the state of reading instruction in your school, set priorities. What components does your school most need to work on? Which components, while not perfect, are good enough for now?

You will read in the first chapter that the most effective schools and teachers “do it all.” But they almost certainly didn’t achieve that pinnacle overnight. Work with your teachers to set priorities. Use the resources we suggest to get your study groups thinking and planning. Observe the changes teachers make to the areas you prioritized, and when you are satisfied that the instruction in the component you targeted is moving in the right direction, work on your next priority. You can do it all—and your teachers can do it all—but not this week or this month, and probably not this year!

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# ONE

## BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE READING PROGRAM

Strike up a conversation with anyone about reading, and that person will have an opinion about how we should teach it:

“Turn off the TV and get rid of the video games.”

“Parents need to read to their children and talk to them.”

“Schools need to cut the frills and stick to the basics.”

“Just teach them good old-fashioned phonics, and they will learn.”

Everyone has an opinion and often a simple answer to the challenging issue of teaching reading. As an administrator whose job it is to provide leadership to your school’s reading program, you must wade through the opinions (which often include simplistic solutions) to discover, explain, and support a sound reading program in your school.

Most of this book is devoted to describing the roadblocks to good reading instruction, the indicators of effective instruction, and practical solutions to implement in areas in which you determine your school has specific needs. This chapter sets the stage for these specifics by focusing on the big picture and what we know about the current state of reading instruction.

### **Reading Is Complex**

Reading is a complex subject—both to learn and to teach. Adults—who have been reading for so long—often do not realize the many complicated actions that happen in the brain as we read. At the most basic level, our eyes have to focus on the print. We must recognize that the spaces separate words. We have to begin on the left and move across to the right. These eye movements must be learned, and if we were learning to read in another language, such as Chinese, our eyes would move in very different ways.



As we read, we quickly recognize almost every word, pronouncing it aloud or in our minds if we are reading silently. Occasionally, we encounter an unfamiliar word such as *pluvial* and use our phonics knowledge to decode it. Often the unfamiliar word is one we haven't heard before. If *pluvial* is not a word you have a meaning for, you won't know the difference between a pluvial lake and other kinds of lakes unless the text goes on to clarify the meaning of *pluvial*. If you cannot associate meaning for several of the key vocabulary words in a passage, your comprehension will be impaired because associating meanings with words is critical for comprehension. As you are reading, you must also read fairly quickly and give the words the kind of phrasing and expression you would give them if you were speaking the words. This fluent reading allows you to get meaning from phrases of words and promotes comprehension.

Indeed, reading is multidimensional—it requires the brain to perform many functions simultaneously. No matter what kind of text you are reading, print processing, automatic word identification, decoding, fluency, and meaning vocabulary are essential to comprehension. In addition, different kinds of texts require different strategies. Most children read stories better than they read informational texts. Because so much of their reading has been stories, they have learned what is important to pay attention to. Stories have characters and settings and problems to be solved or goals to be reached. Texts that compare and contrast the kind of animal and plant life found in deserts and in rain forests have none of these story features. Nor do texts that explain how the water cycle works or why climate change is an issue we should all be concerned about.

Reading may even be the most complex subject we teach because comprehension is what matters, and comprehension depends on all these parts working smoothly together. The need to learn how to read many different kinds of texts in different subjects adds another dimension of complexity. There can be no simple solution for helping all our students become proficient at the complex task of reading.

## Reading First Didn't Work

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed in 2002, it promised that by 2014, all children would read at grade level. Although NCLB did not require the implementation of specific commercial reading programs, the Reading First component of the legislation did require that reading curricula must be based on “scientific” research. This requirement led almost all schools that received federal funds to adopt one of a few available commercial reading programs. These programs focused almost exclusively on phonics instruction in the early grades; what students read consisted of highly decodable texts with words chosen based on which phonics principles had been taught so far. The programs were also scripted, specifying in the teacher's guide exactly what the teacher should say and how much time should be spent on each part of the lesson. Many school systems, fearful that teachers would deviate from the script, hired monitoring services to ensure fidelity of implementation.

Studies have demonstrated that Reading First was not effective in raising reading achievement scores and that many children were left behind. In the federal government's final report on the impact of Reading First, the evaluators (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008) conclude:

There was no consistent pattern of effects over time in the impact estimates for reading instruction in grade one or in reading comprehension in any grade. There appeared to be a systematic decline in reading instruction impacts in grade two over time. (p. xvi)

The government's official evaluation of Early Reading First (the part of Reading First that applied to preschools) also identified a lack of effectiveness in crucial areas of reading development (Jackson et al., 2007):

Overall, we find that [Early Reading First] had a statistically significant positive effect on children's print and letter knowledge but no statistically discernible impact on phonological awareness or oral language. (p. xxiii)

In addition, results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading (NAEP Reading) demonstrate the lack of effectiveness of Reading First. Seven years into the implementation of Reading First and more than halfway to 2014, 33 percent of America's fourth graders scored below the basic level and 67 percent scored below the proficient level. Only 8 percent performed at the advanced level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Reading First also failed to reduce achievement gaps in reading. The gap between Hispanic and white fourth and eighth graders on the NAEP Reading assessment remained the same in 2009 as it was in 1992 (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2010). Reardon (2011) summarized data that show the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families was 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born twenty-five years earlier.

The failure of Reading First can probably be attributed to two factors: the narrow scope of the instruction and the scripted nature of that instruction. The first main idea of this chapter explains that reading is complex and multidimensional. Consequently, children need instruction in all the components. Instruction in the core programs adopted by Reading First schools was focused almost exclusively on phonics and fluency. Vocabulary and comprehension instruction were largely left until the later elementary years when students supposedly should have already mastered phonics and achieved fluency.

Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) gave a standardized reading comprehension test to 581 urban sixth graders, including both language minority and native English speakers, and found that 45 percent of students scored at or below the 35th percentile. The 262 struggling readers were then tested to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses on the major components of reading. Decoding was above average for 78.6 percent of the struggling readers and a relative strength for the majority of the rest. Fluency was at least average or a relative strength for the majority of struggling readers. What the struggling readers had most in common was low meaning vocabulary knowledge. A study that followed 200 low-income children from