Effective Reading Instruction

The Teacher Makes the Difference
Chapter Questions

1. Why is learning to read considered so important for young children?
2. What is reading?
3. What are the seven characteristics of highly effective reading teachers?
4. What do effective teachers know and do to promote success in reading for all students?

The First Day

Selena is a college student preparing to become an elementary school teacher. For her, this is not just another class, but the real beginning of her teaching career. Without doubt, teaching reading will be the centerpiece of her classroom. Selena recalls fondly her own first grade teacher, Mrs. Roberts, who introduced her to the world of books and reading. Selena hopes she will be a “Mrs. Roberts” to the children she will teach over the course of her career.

Though there are several professors who teach the introductory reading course, Selena has chosen Dr. Favio’s class. Professor Favio is known for her many years of successful teaching in public schools and her rigorous, hands-on instructional methods that get her students ready for their first year of teaching. The professor begins by asking students to read a scenario printed on the cover of the course syllabus.

On one occasion, Frank Smith (1985), a well-known literacy expert who had never taught a child to read in a classroom, was confronted with a taunting question by a group of exasperated teachers: “So, what would you do, Dr. Smith, if you had to teach a room full of 30 five-year-olds to read?” Dr. Smith’s response was quick and decisive. He first indicated that children learn to read from people—and the most important of these people are teachers. As teachers, therefore, you need to comprehend the general processes of how children develop and learn. And teachers need to understand the specific processes whereby children learn to read.

After everyone has finished reading the quote, Dr. Favio continues the class with a question clearly intended to provoke discussion: “How did you learn to read? What do you remember about learning to read? Who helped you? Turn to your neighbor, introduce yourself, and share your thoughts in response to this question.” Immediately the room fills with the buzz of students sharing their ideas about how they learned to read. Selena shares her memories with her “elbow partner,” Terrence. She tells him how she was first introduced to
books by her mom and grandma. “Did they ever read *Clifford, the Big, Red Dog* to you?” asks Terrence. “He was my favorite!”

After a few minutes of discussion, Dr. Favio asks the class to share some of their ideas and records them on a white board at the front of the classroom.

- Little kids learn to read from someone who reads to them.
- I learned to read from my older sister.
- I remember writing letters and asking my mother what they spelled.
- I had a favorite book I memorized because my grandmother read it to me over and over again.
- I remember my teacher reading a great big book to us in kindergarten called *Mrs. Wishy Washy*. I loved that book!
- I watched *Sesame Street*, *Barney*, and *Reading Rainbow*. I learned the letters and some words from watching TV.

Next, Dr. Favio asks her students to define what it really means to read. They are to take one minute of think time, and then share their ideas with their elbow partner. This question makes Selena remember how she struggled in learning phonics. Terrence remarks, “Well, I agree that reading has to include phonics, but I don’t see how you can call it “reading” if you don’t understand what you are reading. I mean, I can call out all of the words in my geology book, but understanding what they mean is another thing. For me, that takes some work!”

Dr. Favio invites comments from the class and records these statements about the nature of reading.

- *I think reading is when you sound out letters to make words.*
- *Reading involves understanding what’s on the page.* (This was Terrence’s contribution.)
- *I learned to read from little books that used the same pattern over and over again.*
- *Learning phonics is the first part of reading and comprehension is the last.*
- *Reading is about learning information that makes you smarter.*
- *Reading is the ability to put together what you know with what the author wants you to know.*

Dr. Favio stops the discussion at this point. She comments in sincere tones, “While these are critical issues for all teachers to reflect upon, when we look at scientific research there can be no doubt that the teacher’s skill and the teacher’s knowledge make the greatest difference in whether or not a young child learns to read. And because reading is, in a very real way, the gateway to social justice, your role as a reading teacher has the potential of changing lives and, therefore, our society."

That, thinks Selena, is why I have chosen to become a teacher.

### Why Is Learning to Read So Important?

The ability to read is a key factor in living a healthy, happy, and productive life. In fact, the ability to read recently has been declared the “new civil right” on the Web site of the National Right to Read Foundation (2001). Without the ability to read, a child cannot fully access his or her democratic rights. Nonreaders and poor readers cannot fully consider political positions and issues; they cannot take complete advantage of available societal or governmental institutions for themselves or their
children or thoroughly access their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Stated differently, we believe that the ability to read is—for all America’s citizens—the essential hinge upon which the centrally important gate of social justice swings.

Conversely, the inability to read has been listed recently as a national health risk. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), an agency of the federal government, has recently registered reading disability or the inability to read on the nation’s list of “life-threatening diseases” because of the devastating and far-reaching effects that reading failure has upon the quality of our citizens’ lives. To clearly understand the full impact that reading failure has upon the life of an individual, we offer the following quote from The 90% Reading Goal, by Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier (1998):

The most expensive burden we place on society is those students we have failed to teach to read well. The silent army of low readers who move through our schools, siphoning off the lion’s share of administrative resources, emerge into society as adults lacking the single prerequisite for managing their lives and acquiring additional training. They are chronically unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable. They form the single largest identifiable group of those whom we incarcerate, and to whom we provide assistance, housing, medical care, and other social services. They perpetuate and enlarge the problem by creating another generation of poor readers” (pp. 6–7).

Ernest Boyer (1995), former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, once asserted that the success of every elementary school is judged by its students’ achievement in reading and writing. He continued by emphasizing that “. . . learning to read is without question the top priority in elementary education” (p. 69).

What Is Reading?

A substantial task in becoming a teacher is learning what particular terms mean and how to use these terms with other professionals in the field. The term reading has been used for many years in a narrow sense to refer to a set of print-based decoding and thinking skills necessary to understand text (Harris & Hodges, 1981). Snow, Burns, and Griffin contend that “Reading is a complex developmental challenge that we know to be intertwined with many other developmental accomplishments: attention, memory, language, and motivation, for example. Reading is not only a cognitive psycholinguistic activity but also a social activity” (1998, p. 15).

Nowadays our understanding of the act of reading has been broadened to include the visual and thinking skills necessary to acquire information from digital video, handheld data assistants, computers, or other technological learning environments (Hobbs, 2005; Messaris, 2005). Add to this broadened definition of reading the idea that the visual and thinking skills needed for acquiring information today are situated in and shaped by increasingly diverse social or cultural settings found in schools, homes, communities, or ethnic groups (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). As a result, the term reading is currently interpreted far more broadly and encompasses the learning of a complex set of skills and knowledge that allows individuals to understand visual and print-based information. The goal of reading instruction, then, is to empower readers to learn, grow, and participate in a vibrant and quickly changing information-based world.

As children begin the process of learning to read, they need to acquire a set of skills and strategies that will help them reach the ultimate goal associated with learning
to read: comprehending what they read whether in traditional print forms or more technology-based formats. On the way to the goal of reading comprehension—that is, understanding the author's message—children must acquire a set of early reading skills or tools that include the following.

- Hearing individual sounds in spoken words (known as phonemic awareness)
- Recognizing and identifying letters
- Understanding concepts about how printed language looks and works
- Increasing oral language (speaking) vocabularies
- Understanding that sounds in spoken language “map” onto letters in written language
- Decoding words with accuracy, speed, and expression

Shanahan (2006) and others (e.g., Durkin, 1966), indicate that the desire and ability to learn to read often grow out of a child’s initial curiosity about how to write letters and words. Consequently, writing very often represents not only the beginning point in many a young child’s journey to learn to read but the finish line as well. At first, young children become aware of letters and words in the world around them. Eventually they may ask how to write their name or spell some other personally significant word or concept (e.g., their pet’s name or the name of a relative). When children are able to write letters and words, a “cognitive footprint” or memory trace left in the brain is deep and longlasting—much longer-lasting than that engendered by mere letter or word recognition alone. Similarly, when children can string words together to construct meaning such as that found in a story, they have “comprehended” text at a deeper and longer-lasting level. In a very real sense, children’s understanding of what they read is deepened and cemented when they can write about it.

As children learn to write, they must learn a similar set of enabling skills to send them on their way to the ultimate goal of writing: composition. To acquire proficiency in writing, younger children need to acquire such skills as:

- Handwriting (upper and lower case letters)
- Understanding writing conventions such as punctuation, headings, paragraph indents, and the like
- Being able to “encode” thoughts into print (i.e., spelling words)

As you can readily see, the components of reading instruction are complementary and reflect a strong and supportive relationship between reading and writing processes (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). Stated differently, it would be most difficult and terribly ineffective to separate reading from writing in an effective reading instruction program.

**Teachers Make the Difference**

Question: What is the primary ingredient in the recipe for every child’s reading success? Answer: A classroom teacher with the expertise to support the teaching of reading to children having a variety of abilities and needs (Braunger & Lewis, 2006; National Education Association (NEA) Task Force on Reading, 2000; National Research Council, 2001; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002).

In 1985, the National Academy and Institute of Education issued *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. In this famous report,
commission members concluded that teacher knowledge, skill, and competence is absolutely essential in helping all learners become strong readers. They added:

An **indisputable** [italics added] conclusion of research is that the quality of teaching makes a considerable difference in children’s learning. Studies indicate that about 15 percent of the variation among children in reading achievement at the end of the school year is attributable to factors that related to the skill and effectiveness of the teacher. In contrast, the largest study ever done comparing approaches to beginning reading found that about 3 percent of the variation in reading achievement at the end of the first grade was attributable to the overall approach of the program. Thus, the prudent assumption for educational policy is that, while there may be some ‘materials-proof’ teachers, there are no ‘teacher-proof’ materials (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 85).

Competent teachers make the difference in effective reading instruction, a fact that has been verified time and again through research. For instance, The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, or NCTAF, in 1996 declared that by the end of the year 2006, the nation must “provide all students in the country with what should be their educational birthright: access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers” (p. 5), a goal that, sadly, has not yet been achieved (NCTAF, 2006). Likewise, the National Education Association’s Task Force on Reading 2000 noted, “The teacher, not the method, makes the real difference in reading success” (p. 7).

From experience, we know parental attitudes confirm that “It all comes down to the teacher,”—since they [parents] are notorious for competing to get their children into classes taught by the current faculty stars of the school! And why shouldn’t they? Nothing in this world can replace the power of a great classroom teacher . . .” (Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002, p. 4). In a national survey by Haselkorn and Harris (2001), 89 percent of Americans responded that it is very important to have a well-qualified teacher in every classroom. These same researchers found that 80 percent of parents agreed strongly that fully qualified teachers should be provided to all children, even if that meant spending more money. Seventy-seven percent said it is a high national priority to develop the professional skills and knowledge of teachers throughout their careers. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) reported that, “Without telling parents they are doing so, many districts hire unqualified people as ‘teachers’ and assign them full responsibility for children. More than 12 percent of all newly hired ‘teachers’ enter without any training at all, and another 14 percent enter without having fully met state standards” (p. 14). Though these data may have improved somewhat since 1996, it is clear that the problem has not been adequately addressed, especially in large, urban districts having high numbers of disadvantaged children. The poorest children and the most powerless families often receive the least our educational system has to offer (NCTAF, 2006)—what Jonathan Kozol (1991) labels “savage inequalities.”

**Teacher Development Is a Worthwhile Investment.** In a national study of 1,000 school districts, Ferguson (1991) found that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater improvement in student achievement than did any other use of school resources. We also know that teachers’ general instructional ability and knowledge are strongly related to student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996). And an increasing number of studies now show a strong link between what teachers know about the teaching of reading and their students’ achievement in reading (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). In fact, research also suggests that teachers influence
student academic growth more than any other single factor, including families, neighborhoods, and the schools students attend (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Successful schools that produce high student reading and writing achievement test scores, regardless of socioeconomic status or the nature of reading and writing instruction, have teachers who are knowledgeable and articulate about their work (Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2004; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

The Seven Characteristics of Highly Effective Reading Teachers

Emerging from a synthesis of research on effective reading instruction and the practices of exemplary reading teachers in elementary schools, we have determined that there are seven important characteristics that guide us in the central message of this book: the teacher’s knowledge about effective reading instruction makes the single greatest difference in whether or not every child will have an equal and effective opportunity to learn to read successfully in elementary school!

Each characteristic of exemplary reading instruction is stated in terms of what highly effective reading teachers must know and be able to do to provide an effective reading instructional program in early childhood and elementary school classrooms. Highly effective reading teachers:

• understand how children learn oral language and how children learn to read.
• are excellent classroom managers.
• begin reading instruction by first assessing what students already know and can do.
• know how to adapt instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners.
• teach the essential components of reading using evidence-based instructional practices.
• model and encourage reading and writing applications throughout the day.
• partner with other teachers, parents, and community members to insure children’s learning.

We outline each characteristic here, but they will be discussed in much greater detail in the remaining chapters of this book.

Characteristic 1: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Understand How Children Learn Oral Language and How Children Learn to Read

The development of oral language is directly linked to success in reading and writing abilities. Children who come to school with thousands of “words in their head”—words they can hear, understand, and use in their daily lives—are already on the path to learning success (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). Similarly, children from what could be termed “language-deprived backgrounds” must receive immediate attention if they are to have any real chance at reading success (National Research Council, 1998; Johnson, 2001; Reutzel & Cooter, 2005). Thus, we have concluded that highly effective reading teachers know and understand the value of early language development.
Language is mainly a verbal (speech sounds) and visual symbol (printed letters/words) system used in human society that is capable of representing the full range of our knowledge, experiences, and emotions. All humans use language as a tool for having needs met, for thinking and solving problems, and for sharing ideas and feelings (Halliday, 1975). Language is both expressive and receptive. **Expressive language** requires the sender of a message to **encode** or to put his or her thoughts into symbolic systems (verbal and visual) of the language. **Receptive language** requires the receiver of a message to **decode** or unlock the code of the language symbol systems used by the sender in order to construct meaning. Both expressive and receptive forms of language typically take the forms of spoken sounds or written symbols, but may also be represented visually through gestures, art, pictures, video, or dramatization.

The English language is an **alphabetic language**. An alphabetic language is one in which the sounds of spoken or oral language and the symbols or print found in written language relate to one another in more or less predictable ways. For example, the sound /buh/ maps onto or is represented by the letter b. In some languages the symbols used do not represent sounds in the language at all, but instead represent unified concepts or events such as words or phrases. For example, English uses an alphabetic or orthographic system where symbols represent sounds; Chinese, on the other hand, uses a logographic system that represents entire concepts (words) or events (phrases) with pictures.

**The Structure of Language**

The structure of language is typically divided into seven interrelated components: (1) **phonology**, (2) **orthography**, (3) **morphology**, (4) **syntax**, (5) **semantics**, (6) **etymology**, and (7) **pragmatics**.

1. **Phonology** refers to the study of the sound structures of oral language and includes both understanding speech and producing speech.
2. **Orthography** refers to patterns linking letters or **graphemes** to sounds or phonemes in spoken language to produce conventional word spellings (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).
3. **Morphology** refers to the study of word structure (Carlisle, 2004; Piper, 1998). **Syntax** refers to the rule system of how words are combined into larger language structures, especially sentences. Many persons use the term grammar as nearly synonymous with syntax.
4. The **semantic** component of language involves connecting one’s background experiences, knowledge, interests, attitudes, and perspectives with spoken or written language to comprehend the meaning of that language (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Rumelhart, 1980).
5. **Etymology** (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005) is the study of how word meanings and language meanings change over time in popular culture. For example, the meaning of the word bad has been changed from “undesirable” or “awful” to “desirable” or “high-quality.”
6. **Pragmatics** is the study of how language is used by people in societies to satisfy their need to communicate. Research over the past decade has shown that a teacher's knowledge

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**Getting to Know English Learners**

Children who are learning to become literate in English face a dual task. Besides the characteristics of written language, they have to learn an unfamiliar language that in part refers to an unfamiliar cultural background. In fact, the written system from which these students’ home language, culture, and identity is embedded may not even be one that uses alphabetic script as represented by the Greek alphabet. Chinese students, for example, may read symbols that represent whole phrases; Arabic students may read from bottom to top and from right to left.
of language structure and language components relates to and moderately predicts students’ early reading achievement (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; Moats, 1994).

Teachers need to understand how children acquire their ability to speak. There are essentially four major views of how children come by their oral language ability: (1) behaviorist, (2) innatist, (3) constructivist, and (4) social interactionist. **Behaviorists** believe that oral language is learned through *conditioning* and *shaping*—processes that involve a stimulus and a reward or a punishment. **Innatists** believe that language learning is natural or “in-born” for human beings. **Constructivists** believe that language development is built over time and linked to overall thinking ability or cognitive development. **Social interactionists** assume that oral language development is greatly influenced by physical, social, and, of course, linguistic factors found in the child’s immediate environment. Whether teachers work with slow learners, gifted students, English Language Learners (ELL), or typically developing children living in the suburbs, they find that oral language among young children develops along a fairly predictable continuum. However, we also know that language development can be slowed through such external influences as poverty.

Research tells us that reading teachers who are aware of the oral language developmental stages and average rates of oral language development are more likely to be effective in raising children’s oral language development to new and higher levels (Braunger & Lewis, 2006; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002). Also, highly effective reading teachers understand that rates of oral language development vary radically among children (Smith, 2001) and are able to adjust their instructional pacing and expectations accordingly (Braunger & Lewis, 2006; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002). Finally, highly effective reading teachers understand the varying explanations of the reading process and are better able to adapt their reading instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of all children (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

**Characteristic 2: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Are Excellent Classroom Managers**

The term *classroom management* refers to the ability of a teacher to organize, direct, and supervise the classroom environment so that effective student learning is made possible (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Excellent classroom management requires teachers to know and use a complex set of skills and strategies (Morrow, Reutzel, & Casey, 2006; Reutzel & Morrow, in press) to accomplish tasks such as the following.

- Allocating classroom space for multiple uses
- Supplying and arranging classroom materials
- Clearly communicating expectations and rules within a positive classroom climate
- Employing effective instructional practices
- Effectively training students in classroom routines and procedures
- Establishing a predictable and familiar daily classroom schedule

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**Getting to Know English Learners**

By socially interacting with oral language, ELs not only adjust their language to be better understood by others, but seek ways to nudge native speakers to modify their speech as well.
A supportive and well-thought-out classroom environment is integral to achieving the goals of an effective reading program. When planning for an effective classroom environment, teachers must consider the literacy materials available in the classroom. They may need to think about the quantity of genres (e.g., nonfiction, mysteries, poetry), reading levels, and content of materials provided to children. They see classroom walls as blank palettes for instructional displays and student work. The maintenance of a classroom library, the grouping and accessibility of reading and writing tools, written invitations and encouragements, and directions on how to participate in upcoming literacy events are just a few of the many considerations teachers must deal with to be excellent classroom managers (Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2004; Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004).

Characteristic 3: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Begin Reading Instruction by First Assessing to Find Out What Students Already Know and Can Do

**Reading assessment** refers to the observations, record keeping, and ongoing performance tests that a teacher uses to gather information about each student’s reading progress (Flippo, 2003). Classroom assessment should be broadly interpreted to allow examination of students’ literacy processes as well as the products they create. The goal of literacy assessment should be to provide sufficient information for teachers to make decisions about “next steps” for students in their literacy learning, and for the selection of effective, evidence-based teaching strategies.

Excellent reading assessment and careful analyses of data (McKenna & Stahl, 2003; Reutzel & Cooter, 2007) are necessary for effective reading instruction and require that teachers know how to use a variety of assessment skills and strategies such as the following.

- Determining what children *can do*, not just what they *cannot do*
- Understanding the multiple purposes for which assessment strategies may be used (i.e., screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments)
- Using assessment data to inform the selection of reading instructional strategies
- Gaining insight into the processes students use when reading and writing, not just the final products of their reading and writing
- Documenting children’s reading growth and development over time in relation to established benchmarks or standards
- Examining the entire context (the school, the home, and the classroom) of a child’s opportunities to learn to read
- Developing a year-long assessment plan for multiple assessment strategies
- Integrating reading assessment data gathering into ongoing reading instruction and practice
- Using computers and electronic technology to collect, store, organize, and analyze assessment data

Teachers must have a well-thought-out assessment plan to achieve the goals of an effective reading program. When planning for reading assessment, teachers may need to consider the purposes for the test(s), testing conditions, and time needed to collect and, most especially, to analyze the data to shape, adapt, and inform later teaching. Great reading teachers think about how to infuse their data gathering into instruction so as to minimize the amount of time taken from teaching. Masterful teachers...
plan how to use informal data-gathering strategies during whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction. Sometimes, if the school district provides them, teachers are able to use computer software and electronic technological tools like personal data assistants (PDAs) to collect data (Wepner, Valmont, & Thurlow, 2000).

**Characteristic 4: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Know How to Adapt Instruction to Meet the Needs of Learners with Special Needs**

Meeting every student's needs in learning to read in today's increasingly diverse classroom environments can be complex and challenging. Children's ability to flourish from reading instruction can be influenced by any number of factors, including physical, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities; differences between the language of instruction and students' primary language, as with English Language Learners (ELL); access to print materials in the home; parenting styles; previous schooling experiences; cultural differences; economic strata; and more. Unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency in some schools to engage in a "one-size-fits-all" reading curriculum that will not address the learning needs of all children (Raphael et al., 2003; Tyner, 2004). However, the only way to provide solid instruction that meets the needs of learners having special needs in today's classrooms is to pursue what is called "differentiating instruction" (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999). Excellent teachers provide instruction that is responsive to the specific needs of every child based on ongoing assessment findings. How one goes about differentiating reading instruction to meet each child's needs is of critical importance for all teachers (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999).

Today's teachers will need to know how to:

- use a variety of assessment tools for multiple purposes, and then translate their student data into effective teaching plans
- implement teaching interventions using multiple instructional strategies because one size does NOT fit all
- make use of multiple organizational and classroom management techniques.

A workable model for many teachers is to begin with a simple, limited, and manageable small-group differentiated instructional system. Small-group differentiated instruction requires that teachers group children by similar abilities and needs for instruction in groups numbering four to eight. Over time and with experience, these same teachers can gradually expand their practice using a range of instructional strategies to include:

- daily, intensive, small-group, teacher-guided reading instruction in appropriately challenging text levels
- the use of student-selected books and other readings at appropriate reading levels
- sensibly selected classroom spaces accompanied by clear rules, directions, schedules, and familiar routines.

Of course, there are many other ways effective reading teachers adapt instruction for children with special needs. In this book we show you (1) how to use research-based strategies to help students work collaboratively and develop language skills; (2) how to weave in successful experiences in reading history, science, mathematics, health, and other nonfiction texts; and (3) how to encourage children to become more independent literacy learners (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Raphael et al., 2003; Tomlinson, 2001; Tyner, 2004).
Visit a Second Grade Classroom on the Companion CD

“Model Lessons for Literacy Instruction”—Grouping Students

Begin by viewing the Orientation portion of the CD to understand all the options available to you on this CD.

View Grouping Students, Clip 3 under “Second Grade Guided Reading.” Following viewing, read about the grouping of students through Experts, Literature, Teachers, and Students. Their comments are located in the tabbed box below the video viewing window.

Review the video and ask yourself the following.
• How are the Five Pillars of Effective Reading Instruction reflected in current approaches of flexible grouping with students? Cite examples as evidence for each connection.
• What are the three assumptions that teachers keep in mind as they prepare to group students? How do these relate to flexible grouping and the monitoring of progress?
• What examples of grouping did you experience in elementary school? Do these reflect the current characteristics of effective reading instruction? Why or why not?

Characteristic 5: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Teach the Essential Components of Reading Using Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

In the past decade or so, a series of reports has been commissioned dealing with the essential components of reading that young children need to learn and be taught to become successful readers. One of the early reports was sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council. Prominent reading and education experts were convened to review existing research studies to determine which skills must be taught to young children when they are learning to read to prevent them from falling into early reading difficulties or eventual reading failure. This panel issued a report titled Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). A companion document, published in 1999 and intended to make the findings of the earlier report more accessible to parents and teachers, was titled Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children’s Reading Success (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). In these two reports, the National Research Council spelled out several essential reading instruction components that simply must be taught to prevent early reading failure.

Two years later, in direct response to a U.S. Congressional mandate to examine the status of “scientific” research on teaching young children to read, the report of the National Reading Panel on Teaching Children to Read (2000) was jointly published by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. Department of Education. Like the previously published reading research report, a companion document, titled Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read (Armbruster & Osborn,
2001), was distributed with the intent to widely disseminate the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) report to parents and educators. (Note: You can receive a free copy of these reports from www.nationalreadingpanel.org.)

What we now know is that highly effective reading programs focus on (1) curriculum essentials, (2) providing students access to print materials, and (3) effective instruction. Curriculum essentials of evidence-based reading instruction include teaching the following (Burns, Snow, & Griffin, 1999; National Reading Panel, 2000):

- oral language development
- concepts of printed language
- letter name knowledge and production
- sight word recognition
- phonemic awareness
- phonics
- fluency
- vocabulary
- comprehension
- writing/spelling

An equally important component of evidence-based reading instruction is providing children access to various kinds of print materials (e.g., books, poetry, graphic novels, etc.) and print-making supplies (Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2000, 2006). Print and print-making supplies or materials include but are not limited to:

- a variety of interesting and appropriately challenging reading and writing materials to include both good literature and information books
- supportive and assistive technologies for learning to read and write
- sociodramatic, literacy-enriched play in kindergarten
- adequate time for reading and writing instruction
- adequate time for reading and writing practice
- extra time and expert help for those who struggle
- outreach to and involvement of parents in interacting with their children around reading and writing

The third essential component of an evidence-based reading instructional program is, not surprisingly, quality instruction. As noted earlier in this chapter, the quality of instruction provided by the teacher is the single most significant determiner of a child’s reading achievement once he or she enters school (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Evidence-based, high-quality reading instruction includes:

- Reading and writing to, with, and by children
- Making use of captioned television to aid in reading practice at home
- Encouraging the viewing of educational television programming and use of the Internet to increase world knowledge
- Modeling comprehension strategies and encouraging children and teachers to talk about texts to improve comprehension
- Connecting literature study to content learning in other curriculum areas, i.e., science, math, and history
- Creating print-rich, well-organized, and highly interactive classroom environments
- Providing systematic, explicit, and sustained skill and strategy instruction in each of the essential curriculum components of reading instruction
Characteristic 6: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Model Reading and Writing Applications Throughout the Day

In 1975, New Zealand’s renowned reading educator Marie Clay wrote a book titled *What Did I Write?* Children often ask this question while holding up their scribbles and drawings, catching adults off-guard as they begin to explore the world of print. The powerful connection between writing and reading has long been recognized by teachers and researchers alike (Farnan & Dahl, 2003). In 1966, Dolores Durkin wrote the following in her now classic *Children Who Read Early* about how young children become readers:

> In fact, for some early readers, the ability to read seemed almost like a by-product of the ability to print and to spell. For these “pencil and paper kids,” the learning sequence moved from (a) scribbling and drawing, to (b) copying objects and letters of the alphabet, to (c) questions about spelling [writing], to (d) ability to read (p. 137).

Similarly, Clay discovered that

> “In the early child’s contact with written language, writing behaviours seem to play the role of organizers of reading behaviors . . . which appear to help the child come to grips with learning to attend to the significant details of written language” (1975, p. 3).

Here’s what we now know about reading/writing connections: As children read, they learn about how authors structure their writing. They learn about indenting, word spellings, headings, subheadings, and more. They also learn about how authors select words to convey an idea or feeling as well as gain greater insight into how authors organize and present their thoughts in print. No evidence-based reading instructional program is complete without daily, planned opportunities for children to engage in “reading like a writer” and “writing like a reader.”

Characteristic 7: Highly Effective Reading Teachers Partner with Other Teachers, Parents, and Community Members to Ensure Children’s Learning

Reading teachers in the twenty-first century no longer have the luxury of viewing home involvement as merely a good or even an important idea. There is now substantial agreement among literacy researchers and master teachers that parents can make powerful contributions to their children’s success in early literacy learning (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Paratore, 2003). Therefore, the teacher’s reaching out to parents and homes is vital to young children’s progress in learning to read successfully.

For example, in a large-scale, federally funded study of 14 schools in Virginia, Minnesota, Colorado, and California, teachers, administrators, and parents were interviewed, surveyed, and observed to determine the characteristics of effective schools and classroom teachers who were *Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read* (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999). One of the six key school-level factors in this study that was clearly associated with the most effective schools in teaching at-risk children to read successfully was outreach to homes and parents. According to the researchers, “The four effective schools made a more concerted effort to reach out to parents than the other schools. Efforts included conducting focus groups, written or phone surveys, and having an active site council on which parents served” (p. 2).

The findings of the Virginia study were echoed in other research in a major urban school district having high poverty conditions. In *Perspectives on Rescuing*
Urban Literacy Education, R. Cooter (2004) described results of a privately funded “failure analysis” to learn what teachers must know and be able to do to reverse a 76 percent reading failure rate for this school district’s third graders. Five “pillars” or instructional supports, the report concluded, were necessary to ensuring reading success—one of which was family and community involvement. “Most parents help their children at home [with reading] if they know what to do; thus, teachers must be supported in their efforts to educate families in ways they can help their children succeed in the home” (p. 22).

There are many examples of excellent family literacy programs that may serve as models for teachers as they make plans to reach out to families. Perhaps one of the best-known family literacy programs nationally is the Even Start, program which has involved over 80,000 children and adults (St. Pierre, Gamse, Alamprese, Rimdziux, & Tao, 1998). Project FLAME (Family Literacy Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando), a program designed for English Language Learner (ELL) parents and children, is yet another example of a nationally recognized family literacy program (Rodriquez-Brown, Fen Li, & Albom, 1999; Rodriguez-Brown & Meehan, 1998; Shannahahn, Mulhem, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). Parents involved with the Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP) (Paratore, 2003) as well as those trained in Project EASE (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000) significantly influenced their children’s early literacy development prior to school and substantially impacted their children’s early reading progress once in school.

Effective teachers of reading focus on building strong, sturdy, and easily traversed bridges between the classroom and the homes of the children they serve in order to help every child have a successful experience in learning to read and write.

The Five Pillars of Effective Reading Instruction

In each chapter of this book, we include five sections we think of as the pillars of effective reading instruction, derived from the seven characteristics of highly effective reading teachers we have just discussed. We call these “pillars” because these five elements (see Figure 1.1) are like the pillars found in many great buildings that support the integrity of the entire structure.

In the context of our discussion of effective reading instruction, the five pillars provide an integral supporting structure. The five pillars will help you organize your understanding of effective reading instruction like other master teachers of reading. What follows is a brief description of each of the five pillars of effective reading instruction that guide the organization of succeeding chapters in this book.

- **Teacher Knowledge.** Educational research over recent decades has verified the basic skills and strategies of reading and the approximate order in which they should be taught. Effective teachers know this sequence of skills and approach their teaching with this important knowledge.
- **Classroom Assessment.** Teachers must know which reading skills each child has already developed and which he or she has not. Master teachers are able to quickly assess each student’s knowledge, create instructional roadmaps of what children know, and then teach students according to their specific needs. Assessment happens in these classrooms before, during, and after
instruction has taken place. Assessment is essential for making sure every student receives appropriate instruction, and then verifying that learning has taken place.

- **Effective Instruction.** There is a veritable mountain of research evidence on the preferred ways of teaching each of the important reading skills and strategies. Great teachers have a plethora of tools in their educational toolbox to ensure that every child is helped to reach his or her full potential.

- **Differentiating Instruction for Diverse Student Needs.** Children come to school with diverse learning needs. For example, in many school districts English is not the first language for a large percentage of students; these students speak
Getting to Know English Learners
The home-school connection—where adults interact with children in a print-rich environment—is crucial for ELs’ literacy learning as well. Too often, though, the culture of the EL’s home is unlike the culture of the school and ELs’ literacy learning can suffer.

Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Hmong, and so on. Teachers need to know a variety of ways to help these students learn to read and write in English. In addition, it has been estimated that up to 20 percent of students come to school with various learning differences, such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexia, cognitive challenges (i.e., “slow learners”), language deficiencies, and behavioral disorders (BD). Our goal must be to help all students succeed. Effective reading teachers must have the necessary tools for adjusting instruction to children with diverse learning needs if all are to reach their potential.

• Family/Community Connections. It has been said that 80 percent of what students learn occurs outside of school. We know from research, for instance, that children who have been read to a great deal before entering kindergarten have a much stronger language base and are far more likely to succeed in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Parents and many involved others in the child’s extended family and community are often interested in helping children develop as readers—if they know what to do. Thus, teachers can add great power to a child’s literacy learning program by educating the adults in their lives in proven reading development strategies that make sense in our busy world.

Reading Teachers Make the Difference!

So then, we return full circle to our earlier question: What is the primary ingredient in the recipe for every child’s reading success? We hope that by now you understand the significant role you play in the reading success of each and every child you teach or will teach. You are the hero in every child’s literacy learning drama! Research absolutely confirms that your knowledge and skill in the teaching of reading is incredibly important, and we conclude our opening chapter with a little more proof (Braunger & Lewis, 2006; Clark & Peterson, 1986; National Education Association (NEA) Task Force on Reading, 2000; National Research Council, 2001; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002).

In an interesting reversal of research perspective, students in grades K–12 were asked about the characteristics of their most influential reading teachers. The studies were conducted to discover student perceptions of what teachers do in exemplary reading instruction that helps them succeed (Ruddell, 1995; Ruddell & Harris, 1989; Ruddell & Kern, 1986). The results of the studies indicated that exemplary reading teachers (a) use highly motivating and effective teaching strategies; (b) build strong affective relationships with their students (this relates to interest, attitude, and motivation); (c) create a feeling of excitement about what they are teaching; (d) adjust instruction to meet the individual needs of their students; (e) create rich classroom environments to support their teaching; and (f) have strong organization and management skills.

Taylor and colleagues (1999) studied the literacy practices of exemplary teachers in high-poverty schools that “beat the odds” in teaching children to read. Students in this study were considered at-risk because they came from low-income families, but had average or above-average scores on reading achievement tests. Two teachers each from grades K–3 in 14 schools from across the United States participated in
the study. Each teacher was observed five times from December to April for an hour of reading instruction. Teachers also completed a written survey, kept a weekly log of reading and writing activities in their classrooms, and were interviewed at the end of the school year. These masterful teachers focused their reading instruction on small-group instruction, provided time for students to read independently, monitored students’ on-task behaviors, and provided strong links to homes with consistent communication. These tremendous teachers also included in their reading instruction a focus on explicit phonics instruction and the application of phonics while reading and writing connected text. They asked high-level comprehension questions, and were more likely to ask students to record their responses to reading in writing.

Metsala and Wharton-McDonald (1997) carefully collected survey and interview data about the most important reading instructional practices among 89 K–3 regular education and 10 special education teachers identified by their school principals as “outstanding.” These first-rate reading teachers were described by their peers and supervisors as “masterful” classroom managers who handled time, materials, and student behavior with finesse. These superior reading teachers held high expectations for their students and had a real sense of purpose, direction, and objective. At the top of the list of common practices was a print-rich classroom environment. They also provided daily doses of skill and strategy instruction, access to varied types of text, and adapted their classroom reading instruction to the ability levels or needs of their students. These extraordinary teachers worked to motivate their students to engage in reading and writing regularly and consistently monitored student progress.

In yet another study of primary level exemplary reading teachers, Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) found that these teachers, as we saw in earlier studies, created print-rich classroom environments. See a pattern forming? In these print-rich classrooms, teachers orchestrated a variety of learning activities involving the whole class, small groups, and independent seatwork. Instruction was often individualized and occurred on a one-to-one basis. Learning was sometimes teacher-directed; sometimes self-directed through the use of learning centers. Classrooms were rich with student conversation and interaction. Teachers planned and implemented regular times for writing, word analysis instruction, and comprehension strategy instruction. They also made consistent efforts to connect reading and writing instruction to the content taught at other times of the day in core subjects like science, math, and social studies. Many of these same effective practices were reported and confirmed by Cantrell (1999a, 1999b) two years later in her study of the effects of reading instruction on primary students’ reading and writing achievement.

In summary, a synthesis of several case studies of exemplary reading teachers in the early childhood and elementary grades found that effective reading teachers share several important characteristics (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Block, 2001; Cantrell, 1999a, 1999b; Morrow, et al., 1999; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley et al., 1996; Pressley, Allington, Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2002; Wharton et al., 1997; Wharton-McDonald, Collins-Block, & Morrow, 2001). Masterful reading teachers:

- Provide clear explanations and model how to perform specific reading and writing skills, strategies, and behaviors
- Engage students in constructive conversations with teachers and with other students
- Create a supportive, encouraging, and nurturing classroom climate
- Weave reading and writing throughout the curriculum and throughout the day
Chapter 1  Effective Reading Instruction: The Teacher Makes the Difference

- Integrate content area topics into literacy instruction
- Create print-rich classroom environments with a variety of literacy materials that support instruction readily accessible
- Meet individual needs in whole-class, small-group, and independent settings
- Implement excellent organization and management decisions
- Develop strong connections with their students’ families, homes, and communities

A common myth about teachers goes something like this: “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.” Another equally distasteful myth alleges that “Teachers are born, not made.” Neither could be farther from the truth. Teachers today must understand a great deal about how children develop and learn generally, about how they develop and learn to read specifically, and about how to assess and teach children in a classroom filled with diversity that did not seem to exist in the past. Today’s teachers are expected to know more and do more than teachers at any other time in our history. Teachers must know how to teach by mastering and implementing a body of knowledge related to language development, children’s literature, curriculum standards, classroom management, and learning. They must be able to assess students’ strengths and needs, plan effective instruction that focuses on the essential components of reading, and ensure that every child makes adequate yearly progress so that no child is left behind. In the end, the expert teaching of reading requires some of the best minds and talent to be found in our nation. Like Louisa Moats (1999), we too, believe that teaching reading is rocket science!

Classroom Applications

1. Read *Using Research and Reason in Education: How Teachers Can Use Scientifically Based Research to Make Curricular and Instructional Decisions*. Working with other members of a small group, list ten reasons why teachers should rely on the results of scientific research to inform their instructional and curricular choices. Share your group’s list with the rest of the class. Collapse all of the small-group charts into a single class chart.


3. Organize into small research groups. Select a grade level from kindergarten to third grade. Read *Starting Out right: A Guide to Promoting Children’s Reading Success*. Prepare a class presentation on student accomplishments in reading and writing at the grade level you selected.

4. Read “Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read” (Ciera Report No. 2–006), available on the Web at [www.ciera.org](http://www.ciera.org). In small groups, prepare a brochure or pamphlet that explains to parents, teachers, and school administrators the characteristics of schools and teachers who succeed in teaching all children to read. Share your pamphlet with your class or with parents at your first open house.
Recommended Readings


