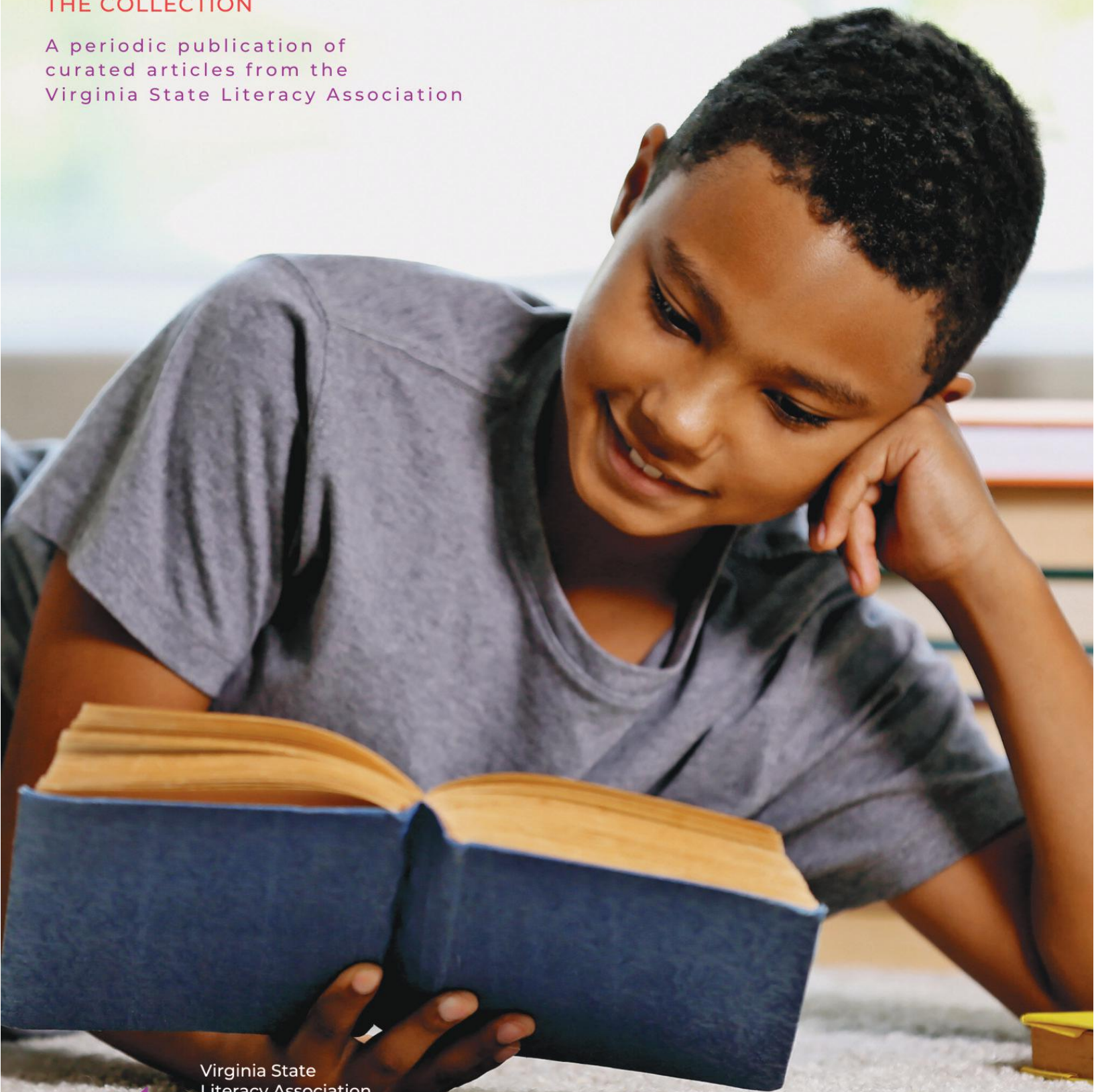


Volume 2 / Summer 2022

## THE COLLECTION

A periodic publication of  
curated articles from the  
Virginia State Literacy Association



Virginia State  
Literacy Association



# VSLA

The Collection is a periodic and themed publication of curated articles from the Virginia State Literacy Association. Look for our next edition in Late Fall/Early Winter.

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July, 2022

Dear Fellow Educators,

We proudly enclose the second edition of VSLA's The Collection, a publication series dedicated to delving into a single, rich literacy topic intended to enlighten our community. This year, our series focus is the Science of Reading and all of our articles are intended to enlighten the reader about this very pertinent subject matter. In this series, we continue to explore the subject matter ensuring that we keep our eye on your needs in the classroom.

This second edition of the three- part series in the Science of Reading space features articles dedicated to bringing light to aspects of effective teaching. An article by Lynn Kulich, PhD talks about equitable reading practice in our classrooms. Thanks to Suzanne Carreker, PhD, CALT, QI we include an article that focuses on decoding and oral language comprehension as the underpinnings for the successful structure literacy approach. Terri James Cozart brings the Science of Reading into the classroom by creating an appreciation of the science itself informing our teaching. Lenora Forsythe, EdD, Ashley Kohn, Med and Maria Arnett, MED offer high quality interventions for all students. Finally, Brooklin Trover looks at teacher emotions and success with upper grade readers using the Science of Reading as a launchpad.

I hope you enjoy this second installment of The Collection. To help educate us all in the Science of Reading, a helpful glossary will be coming directly to you shortly. Like the last edition of the glossary, the new one will compliment the articles in The Collection.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer. See you back in school in the Fall!

Best wishes,

*Laura Labyak*

Laura Labyak  
President, VSLA  
laura.labyak@vslatoday.org

# The Educator's Science of Reading Glossary



Check your inboxes over the summer months.

The second edition of the Science of Reading glossary will be coming to you soon!



## CONTENTS

- 6 Taking the Science of Reading into the Classroom
- 10 Leveraging Teacher Emotions for Student Success:  
A Recommendation for Upper Grade Teachers with  
Struggling Readers
- 13 The Key Components of Structured Literacy
- 15 Equity – A Matter of Text Complexity
- 17 High-Quality Interventions to Ensure Literacy for  
All Students



# Taking the Science of Reading Into the Classroom

Terri James Cozart

What we don't know can't hurt us.... Many of us are familiar with this adage and would agree that it is inaccurate. Recent experience with a nationwide pandemic supports this theory. We've navigated through unknown territory and made countless decisions based on frequent changes in the science and what scientists have learned. Simply put, we don't know what we don't know.

It's obvious, though, that change is here to stay. The best science recalculates according to current data and new information. New science causes us to reevaluate and change our practices accordingly.

What if the educational community approached reading instruction in this way? What if we engaged in thinking processes that welcomed change and innovation? What if we regularly read and pondered the research regarding the science of reading? What if we tried to understand how the brain processes and orthographically maps sound? What if we relinquished some teacher territory and let sound research guide our decisions? What if we lined up behind what science says instead of what we think works?

What if?

Teachers and leaders in my elementary school did just that. We started asking a few more questions. We learned plenty, observed progress, and now understand clearly that there is always something new to learn. Our students learned about the language they brought with them to school, and they experienced success. They learned to decode, encode, and then use those skills while reading and enjoying books. We dropped practices that encouraged guessing at words in the text. Our students learned to read rather than how to avoid reading.

As we shifted toward teaching with the science of reading research as our firm foundation, we made changes in five key areas: phonological awareness; handwriting; spelling; reading decodable texts; and using a systematic scope and

sequence of decoding skills to guide us.

## Sound Off

The National Reading Panel addressed phonological awareness, and David Kilpatrick's work further affirmed the necessity of this component within instructionally sound reading programs. Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate units of sound in spoken language. Science research of the brain's function indicates that students with dyslexia have deficits in trying to "map" letters onto correct speech sounds. However, the National Reading Panel's guidelines recommended a phonological component for all readers. Fortunately, this area is one that is most responsive to intervention, and the science tells us that improving these skills can actually change brain function.

We added a phonological awareness component to our daily instruction. For five to ten minutes a day, we practiced breaking words into syllables, deleting initial and ending sounds, substituting phonemes, and listening to our kids. We began noticing that our students' oral errors mirrored their encoding errors. We were beginning to learn why kids spelled trap as chrap and think as thing. Our newfound knowledge enabled us to respond with targeted and explicit instruction to correct these types of errors.

## Write On

Reading research supports explicit handwriting instruction within a structured literacy program. Besides the more obvious motor skills involved, handwriting also engages the brain's working memory processes. Naming letters and then writing them efficiently assists students in retrieval from long term memory storage. Other cognitive processes involved with handwriting include processing visual and sensory information and engaging the orthographic loop.

Our team of literacy professionals collaborated to develop more standardized handwriting practices and expectations

for our learners. Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students spent time daily working in individual tracing books. Students didn't just trace, though. Teachers and paraprofessionals observed and provided targeted, explicit feedback to students. One particularly astute first grade teacher named and categorized all the manuscript lowercase letters as "straight down", "back curve", "hit the ball", or "slide down" letters. Students sorted letters into these categories, and teachers snuck in a little multisensory movement when air writing and table tracing the letters. We received an unexpected bonus as students' common letter reversals of *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q* significantly diminished. Daily writing of the alphabet in two distinct lines, *a-m* and *n-z*, demonstrated to many students—even our older ones that *elomenop* did not exist!

### **Spell It Out**

Pioneers in the field of reading research, such as Louisa Moats, have emphasized the need for an explicit spelling approach. Since reading and spelling are complementary processes, teaching one without the other just does not line up with what we now know about reading. Contrary to popular belief, English is not a haphazard language with random spelling rules. It is systematic, and experts tell us that approximately 98% of our words can be decoded and are phonetically regular.

This was one area in which our response to the science was fairly easy. We eliminated the Monday spelling list, and we actually taught spelling better than ever before! We focused on spelling features within reading groups, tapped out and wrote real and nonsense words, dictated phrases and sentences, and truly assessed students' word knowledge using unfamiliar words, but familiar patterns, in assessments. We paid attention to student writing too. Kids utilized their spelling knowledge to help unlock the patterns within their written words. Predictably, students applied these skills and transferred them into their own writing.

### **Crack the Code**

Reading experts recommend the use of connected, decodable text to support developing readers as they apply phonics skills and principles in context. If texts are too difficult or contain too many unfamiliar and unlearned patterns, then students cannot crack the code. This inevitably leads to frustration for students, which can often negatively impact social and emotional development. Good readers are fluent readers, and when students practice reading with decodable texts, they build the necessary accuracy and automaticity that lies at the heart of fluent reading.

We took careful inventory of our school's books. We had plenty of leveled texts, but these did not provide the type of systematic practice our students needed. As a result, we made efforts to select, purchase, and utilize decodable books and passages containing specific patterns. When reading these texts, students reinforced speech to print relationships from their daily classroom work. It is important to note, however, that students were not limited to decodable text only. We engaged students with a variety of texts in other core areas throughout the school day to provide more vocabulary exposure and build essential background knowledge.

### **Stick to the Plan**

Key descriptors in defining structured literacy are the terms systematic and sequential. There are any number of scope and sequence skill lists available to schools, but progress doesn't occur because of a singular "magic" list. Rather, teachers and leaders build daily habits while remaining consistent with a definite and common set of skills. This is especially critical for readers who struggle and need more repetitions in order to make learning permanent.

*One particularly astute first grade teacher named and categorized all the manuscript lowercase letters as "straight down", "back curve", "hit the ball", or "slide down" letters. Students sorted letters into these categories, and teachers snuck in a little multisensory movement when air writing and table tracing the letters. We received an unexpected bonus as students' common letter reversals of *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q* significantly diminished. Daily writing of the alphabet in two distinct lines, *a-m* and *n-z*, demonstrated to many students—even our older ones that *elomenop* did not exist!*

As our school struggled to instruct in ever-changing virtual and in person learning environments, we had an opportunity to utilize a reading intervention program that incorporated all of these elements. Classroom teachers latched on to the explicit teaching, the daily practice, the multisensory applications, and closely monitored student progress. Teachers accumulated data and used it to respond to student needs. Progress naturally followed. Leaders also collected specific and systematic data for those students who failed to make adequate progress. Teachers were able to make more informed and accurate decisions about their instruction and which students needed more intensive services. We had quality data for more accurate and valid referrals for special education services.

Our work is not done, but we intend to trust the science, keep teaching the fundamentals, hold to a definite scope and sequence of skills, and continue to respond appropriately. As we learn more about how best to teach our students to read, we will continue to ask *What if?* The reading science is changing, and we will too!

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Virginia State  
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## ***The Collection Publication Series – Call for Reviewers***

### **Mission**

*The mission of Virginia State Reading Association, as an authority on literacy education, is to lead in the advancement of literacy across the Commonwealth.*

**TITLE:** *The Collection* (volume 3): The Science of Reading, Fall 2022

### **Call for Reviewers:**

Would you like to be engaged in reviewing a peer-reviewed publication? If so, please send Dr. Jessica Talada an e-mail at [jessica.talada@vslatoday.org](mailto:jessica.talada@vslatoday.org). This e-mail should include your experiences related to literacy instruction. You will want to highlight your professional roles and your experiences. Please join us in this exciting professional opportunity!

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# Leveraging Teacher Emotions for Student Success: A Recommendation for Upper Grade Teachers with Struggling Readers

**Brooklin Trover,**  
*National Director, Content and Implementation with Curriculum Associates*

It is a repeating cycle of emotions that flow through every upper grade teacher a few times a year as they work with a struggling reader. First comes the frustration that a student has made it to their grade level and doesn't have the foundations needed for on-level reading. Then comes empathy for the student and their previous teachers because teaching reading is a hugely difficult task, especially as students fall behind their peers. And sadly, the last feeling is defeat, as they believe anything they could possibly try will just be too little too late at this point.

## **Frustration, empathy, defeat.**

The time has come to change that cycle of emotions for upper grade educators. The recent push of well researched work on the science of reading is the perfect catalyst for that change.

## **Frustration Becomes Motivation**

Although the work of Gough and Tunmer (1986) on the Simple View of Reading has been continually supported by other researchers over the past 36 years, many educators are unfamiliar with the formula. Often upper grade teachers do not receive professional development in reading instruction because they are not teaching a foundational grade level. This oversight can begin to be remedied with a brief examination of the main drivers in the Simple View of Reading.

**Table 1**

<b>Student Skill Description</b>	<b>*D x LC = RC</b>	<b>Comprehension Effect Description</b>
A student has low decoding skills and strong language comprehension skills.	$1 \times 10 = 10$	Any number times 1 can only be as big as its own value, there is no increase in reading comprehension.
A student has a slight increase in decoding skills and has strong language comprehension skills.	$3 \times 10 = 30$	A large increase in comprehension occurs when the weak variable increases and the other is strong.
A student has minimal decoding skills and minimal language comprehension skills.	$5 \times 5 = 25$	Comprehension is lower when both variables are minimal – both need to be strong for strong reading comprehension.
A student has a large increase in both decoding skills and language comprehension skills.	$9 \times 8 = 72$	Comprehension grows tremendously as both variables increase in strength.

\*D (decoding) LC (language comprehension) RC (reading comprehension)

**Figure 1**

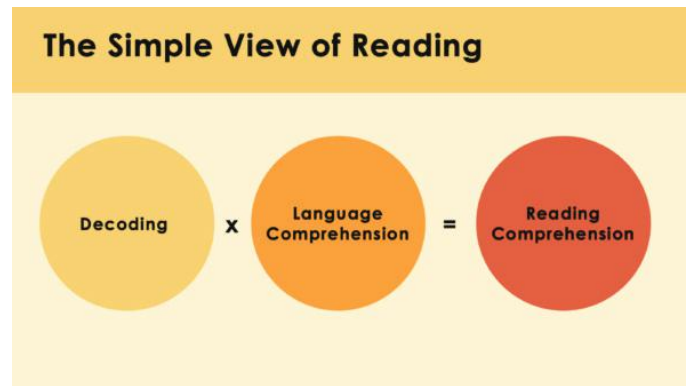


Figure 1 illustrates that strong reading comprehension cannot take place unless BOTH decoding skills and language comprehension skills are strong. What is astounding is the process is not additive, where a slight increase in either area will result in just a slightly bigger total. Instead, this view uses a multiplier, and the reading comprehension product has the potential to be a much larger total! The belief by some upper grade educators that foundations instruction for older students is just too little too late, is simply incorrect.

Consider these mathematical representations of a change in foundational skills. In these scenarios strong skills are represented by the number 10 to showcase how the multiplicative effect impacts reading comprehension. Even a little increase in one foundational skill can have a large impact,

especially if the other variable is already strong.

The science of reading research that is not experienced by many upper grade educators in their pre-service training or professional development, is the exact research that can change a feeling of frustration into a feeling of motivation. Teachers can see their impact is possible. It is very motivating to know that they are able to positively contribute to the reading comprehension ability of a struggling student regardless of the grade they teach.

### **Empathy Becomes Clarity**

Newly motivated with knowledge gained from the Simple View of Reading, teachers can move beyond feeling empathetic for their struggling students and should seek clarity for instruction. Teachers must uncover what is hindering students from on-level reading. However, we are once again plagued with the challenge that upper grade teachers may not have the experience or resources to quickly gain this clarity. They cannot hold this weight entirely on their own. Everyone deserves a good coach! And good coaching makes all the difference when change in performance is the goal. Even the greatest performers and athletes have coaches that measure a range of factors and give feedback so that the artist or athlete can make proper adjustments and move forward more successfully. An upper grade teacher must have this same level of clarity, illuminating strengths and areas of need for their struggling student to plan targeted reading instruction. It must be systematically determined what is impeding comprehension for the struggling reader.

Foundational skills assessments will direct teachers to detailed information within both components of reading. First, decoding, which is defined by Hoover and Gough (1990) as, "efficient word recognition." Skills within word recognition include phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences, and sight recognition. These skills become increasingly automatic as a student becomes more proficient with them (Scarborough, 2001). Simple oral response assessments can pinpoint exactly which strands of word recognition are already strong and which strands are weaker for a student.

Language comprehension is equally important to measure through assessment. These skills include background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Each of these skills are increasingly strategic, and students grow into an understanding of when to apply them to the text they are reading (Scarborough, 2001). Although these skills may be more familiar to upper grade teachers than the word recognition skills, intervention requires very targeted instruction and therefore assessment

is still vital for teacher clarity.

Empathy must be a short-lived emotion for upper grade teachers when they encounter a struggling reader. Shifting that feeling to clarity gained through detailed assessments allows teachers to remove the impediments blocking on-level reading for struggling students.

### **Defeat Becomes Conviction**

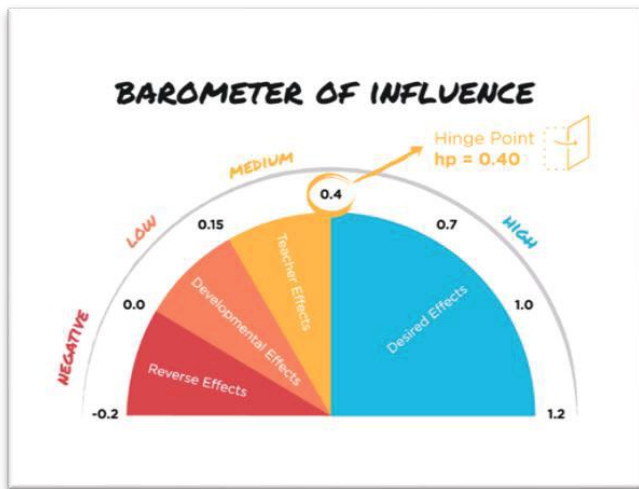
A motivated teacher with all the clarity needed to understand their students may still feel frozen, incapable, or ill-equipped for actual intervention instruction. They've made it all this way but feel the fingers of defeat gripping them as they absorb the weight of rigorous grade level demands and a pace that must be kept. It is in this moment, this feeling of defeat, that conviction must rise from within. We work in a human industry with life changing results. It takes conviction to begin, but that first step must be taken. Do something. Get started. Stay convicted to the truth that there is time to change this student's life. Because one action will lead to another, and another, and another. And soon the defeat will feel distant and unacceptable as intervention instruction is taken on with conviction.

A perfect starting point is communicating with the student themselves. This is a human-to-human relationship after all, not simply a one-sided instructional push by the teacher. Struggling upper grade students know they are not as good of readers as their more proficient peers, but they don't often know why, and they rarely have anyone talk directly with them about their struggle. At this juncture it is vital to include the student in what needs to be addressed, why it needs to be addressed, and how it will be addressed so that the intervention can be successful.

Setting learning goals is the exact action needed to raise the conviction in the teacher as well as investment from the student. Open communication about the goal should involve both teacher and student input so the goal is appropriately challenging and offers clear intentions connected to building foundational skills. Teachers should explain to the student what they learned about them from their assessments including the strengths of what the student can already do well, and what the next steps are. Consider showing the student the diagram of the Simple View of Reading and talk with them about how the multiplier will boot their comprehension tremendously. Explain that the reason they need to build these foundational skills is so their reading comprehension can grow as quickly as possible.

It is this specificity and commitment to a learning goal that combine for a very strong and positive effect on student

**Figure 2**



growth. John Hattie (2008) establishes that an influence has a desired effect when it reaches a 0.4 on his Barometer of Influence. It is this hinge point where an influence will have a "greater than average influence" on achievement.

Table 2 lists four influences that have a high effect size directly related to the aforementioned goal setting conversation. When combined, these influences have an even stronger impact and this upper grade struggling student will have a change in their trajectory not only as a reader, but overall, as a student.

The feeling of defeat will no longer linger with upper grade teachers once they take that first step with their struggling students. Everything begins with a single step. When taken with conviction, surely more will quickly follow. It is the nature of improvement and change; we must simply be convicted enough to begin.

**Leveraging Teacher Emotions for Student Success**

Teaching is an emotional craft. The investment teachers have in their students, year after year, comes from this bot-

**Table 2**

Strategies emphasizing learning intentions	
Learning goals vs, no goals	0.68
Appropriately challenging goals	0.59
Clear goal intentions	0.48
Goal commitment	0.40

tomless well of passion and dedication. It is understandable that sometimes a cycle of emotions can take teachers into a place of stagnation. This often occurs when upper grade teachers encounter struggling readers. Unfortunately, that stagnancy does not stop at the teacher level but is also passed along to the student. Little growth occurs, and the student's reading comprehension stays below level.

A change in emotions is recommended for these upper grade teachers stuck in this cycle. By shifting frustration to motivation, empathy to clarity, and defeat to conviction, teachers can leverage their emotions to help lift their struggling readers up and change the trajectory of their lives.

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# The Key Components of Structured Literacy

Suzanne Carreker, Ph.D., CALT, QI

*Decoding and oral language comprehension are the underpinnings for any successful structured literacy approach. Here's how teachers can put these concepts to work in their own classrooms.*

An instructional approach that emphasizes highly explicit and systematic teaching of all important components of literacy, structured literacy covers both the foundational skills like decoding and spelling plus higher-level literacy skills like reading comprehension and written expression. Structured literacy also emphasizes oral language abilities that are essential to literacy development, such as phonemic awareness, sensitivity to speech sounds in oral language, and the ability to manipulate those sounds.

While it may be based on decades of gold-standard research and instructional practice, structured literacy is a fairly new term in the reading world. Structured literacy differentiates reading instruction or programs that are truly informed by the Science of Reading, a comprehensive body of research encompassing years of scientific knowledge, spanning many languages, and sharing the contributions of experts from relevant disciplines.

Many approaches and programs profess to be informed by the Science of Reading, but really just cherry-pick the evidence to accommodate certain beliefs. Hence the need for a term that provides clear differentiation among reading programs and instructional approaches; structured literacy fulfills this need.

## The Pillars of Structured Literacy

Structured literacy goes well beyond phonics to incorporate two critical components of reading comprehension—decoding and oral language comprehension—plus the underpinning components and the instructional practice that aligns with the principles, which include explicit (concepts are directly taught), systematic (a logical order of concept introductions), and cumulative (new learning builds on prior

learning) instruction.

Decoding is the translation of printed symbols on a page into their spoken equivalents. Decoding aims to free cognitive resources to focus on the meaning of what is being read. Two important points to understand about decoding are:

- Reading begins with the translation of printed symbols that connect to words in students' oral language; hence, meaning relates directly and significantly to the decoding of words
- As students achieve fluent reading, decoding instruction diminishes and only remains essential for those students who are not fluent readers. The underpinning components of decoding are phonology (the sound system of language), orthography (the writing system of language), and morphology (the study of morphemes, or meaningful units of words)

## Deriving Meaning from Words, Sentences and Texts

Oral language comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from words, sentences, and texts at a listening level. To derive meaning from words, the reader needs vocabulary, knowledge, understanding of sentence structures, and the ability to infer what the author is implying; thus, explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction is as important to the development of language comprehension as it is to the development of accurate and automatic decoding.

The underpinning components of language comprehension include semantics, pragmatics, syntax, and discourse. The meanings of words and the relationships of words are referred to as semantics. A reader's breadth and depth of vocabulary contributes to reading achievement.

Here's how teachers can translate this into classroom learning:

- Students in grades 3 and beyond continue instruction with Latin- and Greek-based morphemes.
- Students in pre-K through grade 8 are taught grade-appropriate Tier 2 words (e.g., cover, author, title, compare, contrast, arrange, explain, fortunate, reluctant, coincidence) through user-friendly definitions, multiple contexts, repeated exposures, and discussion
- Students learn and explain shades of meaning and their connotations
- Students learn and explain the literal and nonliteral meanings of similes, metaphors, and other figurative expressions

The other key elements of language comprehension are pragmatics (the rules of conversation or discussion like eye contact and taking turns); syntax (the order and relationships of words in sentences as well as the structure of sentences in oral and written language) and discourse (the organization of spoken and written communication).

## **Reading and Academic Success**

Instruction that is informed by the Science of Reading, such as structured literacy, is a proven way to ensure students can become proficient readers and confident learners across the curriculum. And while this instruction is beneficial for all students, it is especially beneficial for students who are at risk for reading difficulties.

By implementing the components, principles, and instructional practice that align to both the Science of Reading and structured literacy, administrators, teachers, and parents can rest assured that all students will receive the multifaceted literacy instruction they need for reading and academic success.

*About the Author: Suzanne Carreker, Ph.D., CALT, QI, is Principal Educational Content Lead at Lexia® Learning, a Cambium Learning® Group company.*



# Equity - A Matter of Text Complexity

Lynne Kulich, PhD

You've probably heard; equity is a hot topic and for good reason. So, what does it mean and why does it matter? What does it look like, sound like, and feel like in our elementary reading classrooms? Let's unpack this and understand why ALL students need us to implement equitable practices.

Research from the past 40 years highlight the lack of student reading progress despite several national school reform initiatives, e.g., A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, etc. To be clear – a lack of significant reading improvement is not because we haven't tried. While teachers, including myself, have implemented what we thought were best practices in hopes of closing reading gaps, we've been limiting opportunities for students to be successfully engaged with complex, grade level text. In fact, for over 20 years we've been assessing early readers to determine their instructional reading levels and assign students a guided reading group with that "just right" text. Unfortunately, that text is often below grade-level for many students, especially our students with disabilities, high poverty, and racial or linguistic diversities. By limiting their opportunities to read grade-level text, we're stifling their growth (Hallinan & Sorenson, 1986). Equity is about raising expectations and granting access to all readers

***Remember, text complexity is a matter of equity. The scaffolds and activities you choose will be different for each guided reading group. Trust the process. Instead of selecting multiple texts below grade-level, plan for the most effective scaffolding to allow students to experience success with grade-level text and standards.***

by providing appropriate scaffolds (ImpactTulsa.org, 2019). We can't continue denying complex text to struggling readers and wondering why they can't keep up with peers and meet grade level expectations.

State proficiency exams require students to decode and comprehend text at, not below, grade- level. If students are busy reading text at their instructional reading levels, albeit below grade- level, then how can we reasonably expect them to read grade-level text on the state summative exams and earn a proficient score? I wouldn't want to try swimming laps in the deep end of the pool if I've only been allowed to tread in shallow water. The jump from the shallow end to the deep end is best accomplished gradually with scaffolding. The same thing can be said about reading grade-level text.

What about that frustration factor? Are grade-level text too frustrating for some students? Well, those text may be challenging but research suggests students aren't "turned off" by complex text. Instead, teachers who explicitly set the scene by defining the purpose for reading, pre-teaching vocabulary, and engaging in assisted reading practices guarantee students a positive reading experience.

Furthermore, Linda Gambrell and colleagues have studied the effects internal and external motivators have on student reading behaviors. Studies of the relationship of text difficulty and motivation suggest either no relationship or a much more complicated one than previously considered. When students are challenged and their learning is obvious, teachers won't need to worry about frustration or a lack of motivation (Gambrell, Wilson, & Gantt, 1981).

Tim Shanahan from the University of Illinois at Chicago supports the use of grade-level text for all students. He's clear about the lack of evidence to support reading growth using instructional level text as opposed to grade-level text. Instead, research suggests that using easier text with students

## Step 2

can actually hold them back and create barriers to growth. Shanahan (2020) recognizes the need to limit complex text for those emergent readers in Kindergarten and early first grade while they're learning to recognize letters and map them to their corresponding sounds. In this space, decodable and predictable text are necessary; however, when students are reading connected text and building fluency, students need to read grade-level text with appropriate scaffolds – this is where good teaching needs to show up.

In the early 2000's, I amassed a classroom full of leveled books. With great care, I sorted the books by reading levels into color-coded boxes and strategically assigned boxes to specific students. These leveled books were designed to match students' independent, instructional, and frustration-level reading levels. After all, with 25 second graders, I had students reading above, at, and below grade-level.

In addition to the classroom library, I had a kit of leveled readers to use during guided reading instruction. With the exception of our reading anthology, students reading below grade-level spent much of their time in guided reading groups with text lacking grade-level complexity while more fluent readers were introduced to new vocabulary and content, as well as complex syntax. I thought I had established equitable reading practices; however, research suggests otherwise (Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000).

So, should teachers continue assessing for students' instructional reading levels? It depends- what's the purpose for leveling? If teachers use instructional levels to limit access to grade-level text, then no. Instead, seek out data shedding light on students' skills gaps, and use the data to differentiate instruction and provide appropriate scaffolds using grade-level text.

Your Standards of Learning (SOL) are clear - there's no time for remediation only acceleration. So, what might equitable reading practices look like in your classroom?

## Step 1

Administer reading screeners that provide the most complete picture of a student's foundational reading skills from phonological awareness and word recognition to oral reading fluency. Keep the [Simple View of Reading](#) in mind and be sure your assessment provides unique data in the decoding and language comprehension domains, which facilitate reading comprehension.

Use the actionable data to determine students' skills gaps so you can differentiate your instruction and provide scaffolding needed for students to read complex text at, not below, grade-level. Differentiation is about the different activities students work on that are designed to meet diverse instructional needs. Some students will benefit from deep word study activities to include orthographic mapping, syllabication, morphology, etc. Scaffolding is about the different supports students need to be successful. Some students will need opportunities to echo read, choral read, partner read, etc. Consider how many opportunities students have to read the same text because some need more practice than others.

## Step 3

Strategically plan guided reading with grade-level text. Remember to consider using that science or social studies passage; they're rich in vocabulary and expository content. Create guided reading groups based on common skills gaps. Ask the following questions: Which students need to improve their reading rate or their reading comprehension skills? Who needs work on decoding multisyllabic words? Who needs help segmenting phonemes or decoding CVCe words? Let the answers to your questions help you group your students.

## Summation

Remember, text complexity is a matter of equity. The scaffolds and activities you choose will be different for each guided reading group. Trust the process. Instead of selecting multiple texts below grade-level, plan for the most effective scaffolding to allow students to experience success with grade-level text and standards.





# High-Quality Interventions to Ensure Literacy for All Students

**Lenora Forsythe, EdD**  
**Ashley Kohn, MEd**  
**Maria Arnett, MEd**

## Introduction: Intervention in the Context of Equity

The January edition of the Collection explored the science of reading. Here we will attempt to connect the science of reading research to equitable literacy practices for all students and the importance of literacy intervention. Recently, The Reading League put forth a call to action for a commitment to “...create equitable access to literacy practices that are grounded in the science of reading for the sake of today’s children, and generations to come” (The Reading League [TRL], 2022). As Burkins and Yates mention in ***Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom***, “we can’t argue that students continue to have trouble learning to read. We also know that “...a disproportionate number of children having reading difficulties are children of color and/or are from marginalized communities” (Morgan et al. 2017; Hanford 2020; Rearden et al. 2018). Our commitment is to educational equity.

One of the most important things that educators can do to achieve educational equity is ensure that all students learn to read. The National Equity Project (NEP) defines educational equity as “reducing the predictability of which students succeed and which fail, interrupting reproductive practices that negatively impact diverse students, and cultivating the unique gifts and talents of every student” (NEP, n.d.). Independent, fluent reading is key to success in school, work, and life. Thus, learning to read should not be a privilege available to some, but rather a basic human right secured for all children.

Even when best efforts are made to provide comprehensive core instruction, intervention remains a necessary tool for ensuring that students receive the targeted instruction they need to overcome reading difficulties. In fact, data from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) suggests that approximately two-thirds of fourth-grade students in the United States lack proficiency in grade-level reading

skills (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019; International Literacy Association [ILA], 2020). While some students may never need intervention, for others it provides a lifeline to a successful future. “Children who do not read well are more likely to be retained a grade in school, drop out of high school, become teen parents, or enter the juvenile justice system. Thus, preventing reading difficulties early in children’s school careers has potential long-term benefits to the individual as well as society” (Connor et al., 2014, p. viii).

NAEP statistics on reading proficiency data illuminate educational inequities further when we examine subgroup populations (NCES, 2019; ILA, 2020). When we match those statistics to the reality of our classrooms, we see disproportionate numbers of black and brown students who are at risk for reading failure. Children may fall into the at-risk category for a variety of reasons—they may learn more slowly, have had fewer relevant experiences before starting school, or have developed difficulties as a result of poor core instruction—and these children require more learning opportunities in order to catch up to their peers (Torgesen, 2004).

In the context of equity, an intervention framework must provide a multilayered effort to ensure that every student receives what they need in order to develop to their full potential. Equitable instruction depends on creating learning communities in which all stakeholders work together to ensure equally high outcomes for all students. Without a tangible commitment to equitable instruction, even the best-intentioned educators are likely to feed into the systemic cycle that has historically privileged certain students and subtly encouraged deficit thinking about others.

Ultimately, all educators must be committed to doing the work on two fronts—the work of their own ongoing professional learning as teachers of reading and the work of providing high-quality instruction for all—in order to overcome the status quo. Examining how we respond to stu-

dents' needs through the use of an effective intervention framework is one small but important step toward equitable instruction. 2

## **Understanding the RTI/MTSS Framework: Intent and Implementation**

Over the last 15 years, the Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Support (RTI/MTSS) framework has informed intervention practices across the nation by providing a multi-tiered approach to the early identification of and support for students with learning and behavioral needs (RTI Action Network, n.d.). The three-tiered framework is guided by a process that helps identify students who are not responding to core instruction and ensures they receive increasingly intensive interventions (Connor et al., 2014).

Assessment results help determine if students are successful with Tier I, or core, instruction, which includes comprehensive whole-class and small-group instruction. Tier I instruction should meet the needs of 80 percent of the students.

Students who are not making adequate progress are also identified via assessment data. The RTI framework suggests that these students (approximately 15 percent) will benefit from an additional layer of targeted, small-group intervention, or Tier II instruction. Typically, Tier II instruction is more intensive and accelerates student learning; essentially, it helps get them caught up so they can return to and fully benefit from core instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019).

When the deficits are not resolved by Tier I or Tier II instruction, more intensive and personalized intervention is warranted. This most intense instruction is categorized as Tier III, and in a strong RTI/MTSS implementation, it will generally be needed for fewer than 5 percent of students (RTI Action Network, n.d.). Collectively, the tiered supports provide a framework for high-quality instruction that ensures all students receive exactly what they need in order to learn to read.

Students who are not making adequate progress toward grade-level expectations should receive intervention, though often it is the availability of resources within a school that determines who actually gets intervention (RTI Action Network, n.d.). In situations where there is a lack of time or resources, students who are identified as having a specific need may be grouped with students who have a different need, or students may not receive an intervention on an identified need if others' needs are greater. Teachers may have difficulty serving the intervention needs of their students alone. Oftentimes, the classroom teacher shares

intervention responsibilities with an interventionist, who is specifically hired and assigned to work with small groups of students. 3

Ideally, the RTI/MTSS framework provides struggling learners with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning to reach grade-level equivalents; educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction gathered from progress monitoring data (RTI Action Network, n.d.).

However, the reality schools face when implementing RTI/MTSS is that it is expensive—both in human resources and material resources—to drill down and support students at the individual level (Jones, Conradi, & Amendum, 2016). In addition, it is time-intensive to personalize the interventions and school schedules rarely allow for layers of instruction. As a result, most schools continue to put all struggling readers together for intervention services rather than group by a targeted need (Jones, Conradi, & Amendum, 2016).

When done well, intervention can make a significant difference in the educational trajectories of students. While there are many challenges to implementing effective intervention, this paper will explore and describe the facets of high-quality interventions. A focus on these best practices may help eliminate the variability in RTI implementations.

## **Best Practices for Effective Intervention**

While implementation of interventions and the RTI/MTSS framework vary greatly across the nation, there are research-supported best practices that contribute to student success. According to researchers such as Gersten and colleagues (2008) and Torgesen (1998), the most effective interventions:

- Occur early in the child's schooling.
- Ensure high-quality instruction.
- Are data-informed.
- Are differentiated and targeted.
- Give special attention to intensity and duration.

As many school districts work to ensure that teachers receive training to deepen their knowledge of the science of reading, the need for high-quality intervention is even more urgent. Teachers are now evaluating curriculum resources with a critical eye. How do they ensure the alignment of instruction across tiers and to the research?

There are evaluation tools to support this investigation.

Administrators that have received the LETRS for Administrators course may consider using the Intervention Review Checklist or the Reading League’s Curriculum Evaluation Tool, a public document found on their website. Both tools bring forth a few considerations:

- Instruction is explicit and systematic.
- Skills develop across a continuum of skills from easier to more complex.
- Instruction includes multiple opportunities to master skills with practice, review and application to reading and writing.
- Assessment includes initial and ongoing monitoring to support instructional decision-making for re-teaching or acceleration.

In the sections below, each best practice is described and connected to its contributions to effective intervention instruction.

### **EARLY INTERVENTION**

The RTI/MTSS framework is designed as a model for early intervention (Connor et al., 2014), meaning that it is intended to address academic and behavioral difficulties as early as possible in a child’s school career. Multi-tier instructional efforts have the potential to prevent struggling readers from facing long-term impact on their academic success. In the realm of intervention, there is an important emphasis on providing early intervention in order to proactively address academic difficulties (Connor et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2008).

Research has long proven that children who have difficulty reading at the end of first grade rarely catch up by the end of elementary school (Torgesen, 2004; Francis et al., 1996; Juel, 1988; Shaywitz et al., 1999; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). When reading deficits are unpacked further, typical findings concur that when students do not master foundational skills early on (by third grade), there is a long-term negative impact on their reading ability and overall academic success. Early intervention is research-proven as an effective measure for reducing—and sometimes altogether preventing—reading disabilities for students at risk of reading failure (Connor et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2008). 4

### **HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION**

Ensuring that at-risk students receive instruction of the highest quality is essential to effective intervention. High-quality intervention includes explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction, is aligned across tiers, and considers the use and

implementation of evidence-based materials.

### **Explicit, Systematic, and Sequential**

A review of the Simple View of Reading framework emphasizes that reading comprehension is the product of two components—word recognition and language comprehension. If either of these is weak, reading comprehension is diminished. Scarborough’s Rope further illustrates how students develop reading skills across a continuum over time. This development of skills in language comprehension and word recognition leads to automatic and strategic skilled reading. Identifying areas of weakness will guide instruction in service of reading comprehension. For most students, direct instruction in the foundational skills of reading is essential to their literacy success. When students do not make expected progress with the explicit foundational skills instruction provided during core instruction, they require additional instruction, or intervention, that is both explicit (direct and teacher-led) and systematic (methodical, incremental instruction organized into a coordinated instructional routine) (Gersten et al., 2008). Students who are identified as needing foundational skills intervention will benefit from instruction that is carefully sequenced so that skills are developed gradually and deliberately. (Torgesen, 2004).

According to the International Literacy Association (2020), explicit and systematic intervention instruction that results in the needed acceleration of progress must also ensure frequent opportunities for student response, provide specific and immediate corrective feedback, support positive approaches to learning and behavioral supports, and teach the transfer of skills. Well-designed, systematic instructional programs ensure that children are taught systematically and are given opportunities to practice the skills before being required to do this work independently (Torgesen, 2004; Swanson, 1999).

### **Aligned Across Tiers**

According to Gersten and his colleagues (2008), intervention curricula should be carefully selected based on their compatibility with the core reading program. In other words, the intervention should align in ways that are consistent with the core program—in sequence of skills, instructional language, and routines. This instructional coherence between core and intervention, or alignment across tiers, is evident when there is an aligned scope and sequence of skills and an increased intensity of the skills taught. Alignment also protects instructional time, as it eliminates the need for additional assessment to determine student placement between tiers. Students (and teachers) benefit from

the consistency in materials, content, and language when there is alignment across tiers (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010; Carnine, 1992).

### **Evidence-Based and Implemented with Fidelity**

High-quality intervention is grounded in scientifically proven materials with a strong evidence base; however, it is not enough for students to simply engage with a strong evidence-based intervention. Ongoing development of teacher knowledge to ensure the successful implementation of the high-quality intervention is also essential, as “curricula alone do not teach” (ILA, 2020). The effectiveness of the intervention is contingent upon the effectiveness of the provider. In order to achieve desired student outcomes and maintain the intervention’s evidence basis, program materials must be implemented as intended.

Teaching as intended requires fidelity to program structure, including content, materials, duration, and frequency as well as fidelity to program procedures, including delivery, techniques, and student engagement. Effective intervention implementations consider both what is taught and how it is being taught (Sidler Folsom & Schmitz, 2018). 5

### **DATA-INFORMED INTERVENTION**

The use of data to guide the decision-making process around high-quality intervention requires schools to consider diagnostic/screening data and ongoing progress-monitoring data alongside the experience of the school team, educational research, and other inputs. Using data to guide and inform instruction is a typical school-wide practice that allows schools to look at the big picture, analyze trends, and solve problems (Hamilton et al., 2009). This type of data analysis should also occur at the classroom level. As students at risk are identified, further data should be gathered and reviewed to determine how to meet the individual needs of students who are not making adequate progress. This type of data analysis goes hand-in-hand with the early identification of reading difficulties; identifying and correctly addressing deficits early helps put at-risk students on a path to reading success (Connor et al., 2014).

Reliable and valid screening criteria are an imperative first step for determining students’ eligibility for early intervention. The screening process uses assessment tools to help teachers identify students who are not meeting grade-level benchmarks. Screening tools may vary across schools, and research has shown that as children develop, they should be screened for different reading skills. Screening tools tend

to be short, individual assessments that provide a variety of information, including a student’s strengths and weaknesses. It is often recommended that for our youngest students, screening be given at the beginning of the school year and mid-year (American Federation of Teachers, 2004).

Ongoing progress monitoring of student development is an important part of the data-informed decision-making process. By definition, progress monitoring is a way to check on student progress in identified areas of concern to ensure the intervention is matched to the need and is, in fact, working. A series of progress checks should occur at predetermined mastery points, typically once a month, but ideally once a week or biweekly (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Progress-monitoring data allows teachers to make decisions to move students to more or less intensive interventions. Reassessing students frequently ensures that students do not get stuck in any tier of instruction and helps teachers monitor and adjust their instruction. Instruction should be fluid and meet the needs of the learner as their skills develop.

Data can help schools reveal gaps in instruction, identify opportunities for improvement, provide insight into appropriate interventions, monitor progress (or lack thereof), and confirm effectiveness of interventions (Hamilton et al., 2009). Data-informed decision-making is integral to supporting student achievement. The allocation of resources for collecting and analyzing data supports the early identification of reading problems, making screening and ongoing data analysis an essential part of effective, data-informed intervention (Torgesen, 1998).

### **DIFFERENTIATED AND TARGETED INTERVENTIONS**

Students may struggle to learn to read for a variety of reasons within and across reading components. Differentiated instruction allows all students to access the curriculum by providing instruction and tailoring learning tasks at their individual points of need. Differentiated interventions that are matched to students’ needs should be implemented to target the specific area(s) of concern in their reading development. The targeted intervention should include the aforementioned best practices—they should be systematic and explicit—with frequent opportunities for students to apply what they are learning and receive specific feedback from the teacher (Gersten et al., 2008). Diagnostic and screening data should inform the target of the intervention, which will vary from group to group depending on the needs of the students as they progress through the stages of reading development. 6

## INTERVENTION INTENSITY

Effective interventions are intense, occurring three to five times per week for 20 to 45 minutes (Gersten et al., 2008; Torgesen, 2004; Vaughn et al., 2012). Greater instructional intensity may be necessary to support children facing the most difficulty. Intensifications include reducing group size, increasing the frequency or duration of the intervention, and/or slowing the pace of instruction (Denton et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2012; Kamil et al., 2008). Tier III interventions are of the utmost intensity and are typically personalized and provided on an individual basis (Denton et al., 2013; Burns, 2010; Kamil et al., 2008). Intensification supports, much like intervention in general, should only remain in use for as long as the child exhibits the need, with the ultimate goal of releasing the student back to Tier 1 instruction.

### Conclusion

Intervention is critical, and yet it is just one part of providing equitable instruction for all students and preventing reading failure. It is imperative that best practices in intervention be paired with best practices for core instruction. If Tier I instruction is lacking, then even the most effective interventions will not be able to remedy that deficiency. In fact, the goal of intensified tiered instruction is to accelerate student learning so that students will no longer require additional levels of instruction and will be able to fully benefit from core instruction. As a reminder to our commitment to educational equity and The Reading League's science of reading definition, we will continue to work to "...improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties."(TRL, 2022)

Returning to the RTI/MTSS framework, core instruction should meet the needs of 80 percent of students. Robust core instruction shares some of the same characteristics of high-quality interventions. All tiers of instruction should include differentiated instruction, opportunities for reteaching, and ample time for student practice. Repeated practice of skills taught using consistent routines, ongoing review, and corrective feedback provides a predictable structure for students and maximizes their opportunities to learn across all tiers of instruction. In the intervention setting, lessons that are quickly paced with frequent student responses allow students multiple opportunities to practice new and previously learned skills multiple times across a single lesson. Interventions that include consistent routines and a predictable lesson structure ensure students have the practice needed to apply their learning independently.

Another fundamental consideration for effective RTI im-

plementations is teacher development. Teachers must receive ongoing support and opportunities to build knowledge in order to orchestrate instructional best practices. A high-quality intervention should provide embedded support to assist teachers in making data-informed decisions based on student outcomes and in building their own knowledge. Ongoing professional learning alongside powerful materials will provide the best opportunity for student growth.

Research widely shows that long-term reading difficulties are preventable when targeted, data-informed interventions occur early and intensively (Torgesen, 2004). With prevention in mind, we return to our opening statement: "...one of the most important things we can do to achieve educational equity is ensure that all students learn to read." Implementation of cohesive core instruction and intervention efforts is one step toward equitable instruction in our classrooms, for all students.<sup>7</sup>

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**Mission**

The mission of Virginia State Reading Association, as an authority on literacy education, is to lead in the advancement of literacy across the Commonwealth.

**TITLE:** The Collection (volume 3): The Science of Reading, Fall 2022

**Fall 2022 Publication Topic:** Building Language Comprehension

- Submissions should focus on expanding the reader's understanding of the topic. Additionally, articles should focus on implementing SoR into tier 1 instruction. Articles that focus on the ways to engage students in learning foundational skills will be prioritized.

**PROCESS for REVIEW/SELECTION:**

Our articles are generally between 1000-2500 words in length and conversational, insightful, and helpful to K-12 educators. (Submissions that exceed 3000 words will not be considered.) Articles should be research-based and give concrete guidance that school leaders and educators can use to improve their practice. Moreover, articles should be written in a straightforward manner. Submissions should be relevant to a national audience interested in our given theme. You are addressing teachers, school administrators, researchers, and other stakeholders in the education community, so remember your audience.

**What we look for:**

- An engaging and informed analysis of the key issue and trend in education
- An informed perspective on this subject/controversial topic (evidence-based information that is practical for classroom instruction).
- An emphasis on the interpretation of the research rather than strict pedagogical theory
- Authentic examples or experiences from work in schools
- Useful articles with strategies/approaches that can be replicated in the everyday classroom

**Avoid:**

- Self-promotion or pushing a program or product
- Articles promoting your personal opinion
- Please do not include jargon. This is intended as a straightforward explanation of the topic.
- Submitting articles that are in the process of being reviewed for another publication.

**How to Submit:**

Timeline:

8/31/22 – Deadline for submissions

9/1/22-9/9/22 – Review of Submissions

9/12/22 – Acceptance notification

VSLA's Board of Directors make all decisions regarding publication and reserve the right to reject material, whether solicited or otherwise, if it lacks quality or timeliness. The Collection will be distributed electronically to all members and archived in the resource section of VSLA's website. VSLA offers no compensation for articles. **If you wish to submit an article, please send it to Dr. Jessica Talada at [jessica.talada@vslatoday.org](mailto:jessica.talada@vslatoday.org).**





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# Committed to the Science of Reading

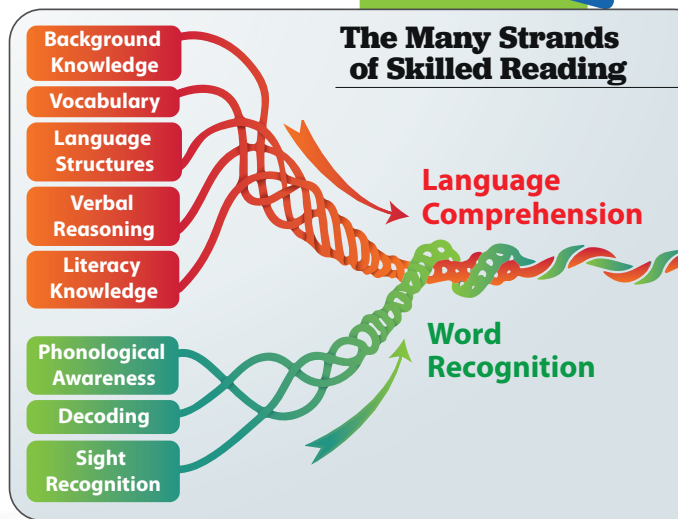
At Curriculum Associates, we believe all children can become skilled readers, and the best way to get them there is explicit, systematic, evidence-based literacy instruction. These beliefs are at the core of *i-Ready Assessment* and *Personalized Instruction*, which work together to lead every child to reading success.

## Reading Is a Complex Process

Decades of research have proven that teaching children to read is an art *and* a science. Thousands of international, interdisciplinary scientific and educational studies have pinpointed what—and, crucially, *how*—we must teach children who are learning to read. The resulting evidence forms the foundation of reading science:



- Humans are not hardwired to read in the same way we are to speak. We must all be explicitly taught to decipher the “code,” beginning with these foundational skills:
  - **Phonological Awareness:** the ability to recognize the individual sounds of spoken language
  - **Phonics:** the automatic association of those sounds with the letters that represent them on the page
- To build fluency, Phonics lessons should be followed by **reading decodable texts** that connect to the student’s recently acquired skills.
- These foundational skills do not compose the entirety of an evidence-based reading initiative, but they lay essential groundwork for building subsequent skills that **integrate word recognition and language comprehension to realize skilled reading** for all students.



## What Does *i-Ready* Do for Our Students Who Are Learning to Read?

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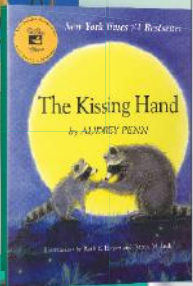
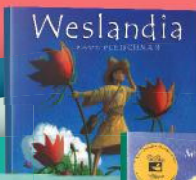
For more information, please contact:

**Shenique Mens-Smith**  
Educational Sales Consultant—VA  
[SMens-Smith@cainc.com](mailto:SMens-Smith@cainc.com)

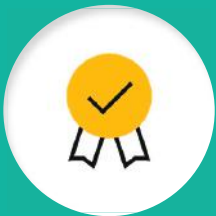
**Steve McBride**  
Educational Sales Consultant—VA, WV  
[SMcBride@cainc.com](mailto:SMcBride@cainc.com)



# A Vision for Student Growth in Virginia

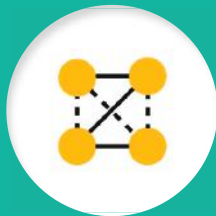


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