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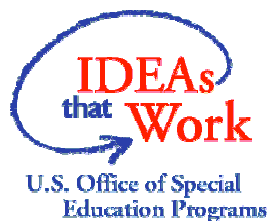
## EMSTAC Extra

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### Answering the questions...

What approach to literacy and reading should be taken to prepare a student for statewide assessment? What role should a student's IQ play in determining reading instruction and success?



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## **EMSTAC EXTRA: Literacy Instruction and Statewide Assessment Preparation for Students with Reading (Learning) Disabilities**

**Please note:** EMSTAC, which is funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), does not endorse any specific educational program or practice, but rather makes recommendations based upon research on the use of various strategies and interventions.

*What approach to literacy and reading should be taken to prepare a student for statewide assessment? What role should a student's IQ play in determining reading instruction and success?*

Although research on reading is mixed and often confusing due to the political history surrounding the "reading wars," the recent research has shown consistently that a balanced approach to literacy works best with most students, including those considered at-risk, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. It's important for students at risk of reading difficulties to have exposure to explicit instruction in language usage and reading strategies, but it's also important for these students to have interesting and varied reading opportunities and experiences. This can be challenging since struggling readers do not often read as much as non-struggling readers. Specifically, the National Research Council, the National Reading Panel, and the RAND Reading Study Group (to publish a report this year), have synthesized the most rigorous reading research representing all perspectives in the reading field. These reports advocate a broad use of instructional strategies, including the use of on-going evaluation and classroom assessment tools in order to determine the needs of individual students at various stages in their literacy development.

In other words, research indicates that it is best to combine more direct approaches geared towards improving phonemic awareness, sound-letter relationships, decoding skills, fluency, sight word development, vocabulary, and other reading strategies that promote reading comprehension through engagement in interesting and relevant literature and other texts. This reading can occur in several ways, including individual silent reading, shared reading among peers, and guided reading with a teacher. It also includes reading commercially published books supplying the content on which students will be assessed. As teachers are well aware, readers must learn to read as well as read to learn. And since reading involves an intricately woven (but not exclusive) combination of decoding (with accuracy, speed, and fluency) and comprehension processes, focusing efforts on one aspect of the reading process exclusively poses the risk of not developing other equally important reading processes and behaviors. It's also important to focus on improving writing skills and using writing as a tool to further growth in reading. This is especially true when preparing students for standardized tests on which they will be asked to demonstrate writing skills. There are several ways to engage students in writing more in the classroom, such as re-writing poorly written texts and writing about each other's works and stories.

The phenomenon known as the “Matthew Effect” (the rich become richer while the poor become poorer) illustrates what often occurs in the reading skills of students in special education (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1996 (42-43); Stanovich, 1986). This effect occurs when students who lack reading strategies and prior knowledge (such as vocabulary and experiences in other subjects) spend most of their instruction time learning decoding skills and other strategies, but read very little in school or at home. Whereas skilled readers read more, poor readers read less. This pattern continues in an upward spiral for the mature and skilled readers while a downward spiral occurs for the unskilled readers. Although direct instruction of reading strategies is a necessary part of a literacy diet (more for some students than for others), it’s not sufficient to developing strong comprehension skills. Students must become engaged readers, although not necessarily perfectly accurate ones, to grow and improve as readers entering middle and high school. Students’ recognition and understanding of unfamiliar words increases with some guided exposure prior to or while reading, and with the experience of actually encountering them in text.

Rather than choosing between ideologies, a better approach would be to incorporate both into instruction and statewide assessment preparation. One way to provide a more balanced approach to literacy in a classroom may be, for example, a combination of developing vocabulary with reading expository text and literature. Using a commercial reading series may be one such way, provided the text is engaging, aligned with the standards, and modified or adapted when necessary. It’s also helpful for teachers to use cognitive strategy instructional techniques, such as scaffolding, activating prior knowledge, and mnemonics.

As a teacher plans to teach vocabulary words and selects reading material, s/he may also want to ask him/herself a few questions to ensure they are used in the appropriate context, such as, “What do I want accomplished by having the child learn these words?” “What do I want the child to gain from these reading materials?” “Are these the kinds of texts student’s will encounter on their testing?” “Do these materials align with the child’s IEP? With the state standards?” As many special education professionals agree, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to educating a child with a disability. An appropriate education suits the child’s individual needs and strengths. Although it can be challenging to individualize a child’s education in such a way, it’s necessary for students to meet their educational goals. When annual goals, benchmarks, and standards are created for a child’s IEP, accommodations and expectations for statewide assessments should also be taken into consideration (U.S. Department of Education, 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.138, 300.347(a)(5), 1999). Let the child’s IEP serve as your guide in preparing the child for the statewide assessment.

Classroom-based assessments can serve as guides, helping to support instructional decisions regarding how much time each student should be spending on vocabulary development and reading strategies. An example of a classroom-based assessment is a miscue analysis of a student’s oral reading. The miscue analysis allows the teacher to determine the student’s reading fluency and accuracy and examine the reading strategies

the student employs while reading. Prompting a retelling of the story or asking questions about the text can also show whether the student comprehends what he/she reads.

Also, as a part of the child's reading education, instruction should include developing cognitive strategy skills ("study skills"). Developing study skills will allow the student to grasp and retain what s/he is learning more effectively, which will also help the student when it comes to demonstrating what s/he knows (e.g., taking a test). Research has shown positive results from the instruction of and the student's use of strategic learning approaches. (If you are an EMSTAC Linking Agent and would like or further information about cognitive strategy skills development, you may access the *EMSTAC Study Skills* web product.) Furthermore, class-wide peer tutoring approaches can be combined with strategic learning exercises after students have reviewed targeted vocabulary. These approaches allow students to work together to practice reading fluently and to practice comprehension strategies. To ensure that development and refinement of these skills occur, the student should use these strategies and skills across the curriculum and at home, not just in reading class. Collaboration among teachers and parents can help reinforce reading and study skills by providing opportunities for repeated use of these strategies and skills across multiple educational settings and at home. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1996 (547-564)).

As for the role IQ should play in determining reading instruction and success, no IQ test can accurately predict with certainty the educational outcomes of any child, regardless of whether the child has a disability or not. Although in an absolute sense (that is, considering the full range of IQ and reading ability), IQ and reading ability are related, reading ability may not be significantly related to IQ within a narrow range of IQs (e.g., within the population of a classroom). It's our opinion that attempting to determine the goals and interventions for a student with reading disabilities based on the student's IQ is neither appropriate nor advisable.

A list of recommended texts and research articles is attached to provide further supplementary information.

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