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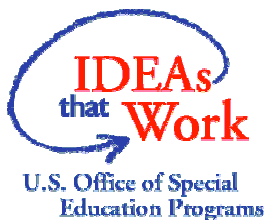
Elementary & Middle Schools
Technical Assistance Center

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EMSTAC Extra

Answering the question.....

What criteria can be used for selecting a reading program?



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Selecting a Reading Program

Selecting a reading program can be a daunting task. An abundance of commercial programs and products exist. Many programs claim that their unique materials and methodologies are the most efficient and effective means of instructing children in the complex task of reading. This problem is exacerbated by the diversity of students in our classrooms. Classroom diversity stems from many factors, including children's prior learning experiences, levels of external and familial support, cultural differences, acquisition of language for all children and especially for English language learners, and skill development (i.e., phonemic awareness, background knowledge, print awareness). Reading is a complex task dependent on so many different elements that it requires reading programs to be adept at addressing this spectrum of issues. A simple solution, or one reading program, may not be the answer to this complex problem (Strickland, 1994).

This guide is not comprehensive, and is meant merely to provide you with guidance and help you begin processing what you will need to know to be informed about developing your own personalized reading intervention.

Scientifically-based, also called research-based, reading programs can provide educators with a well established means of improving reading achievement for children. In deciding which program best meets the needs of your students, you must consider many factors, including:

- Is the program comprehensive and coherent?
- Does the program address all the key elements of reading?
- Is there sufficient research-based evidence for the program?
- What other factors should I consider?

Comprehensive and Coherent

A reading program must be both comprehensive and coherent in order to improve the reading outcomes for children. A **comprehensive program** addresses all the skills and knowledge needed for reading. You may find one program that addresses each of the areas sufficiently. More likely, however, you will find one program that addresses most of these areas and can be supplemented with another program or specific teaching methodologies. Or perhaps you will find two or three programs that can be integrated into the reading curriculum insuring that all areas are thoroughly addressed. However, a comprehensive program alone is not sufficient; it also must be coherent.

A **coherent program** is planned in a sequential and orderly manner. This applies to both 1) age or developmental span within the school or district and 2) the presentation of knowledge and skills. This means that a program must be in place that supports children through the emergence, development and honing of their reading skills. Additionally, the knowledge and skills sets must be presented in a manner that is logical and consistent with child development theory.

Key Elements of Reading

A reading program should thoroughly teach all the skills required for reading. When analyzing each program you should examine the extent to which each of these skills are taught at the appropriate developmental level, built upon a strong pedagogical model, systematic, motivating, participatory, and offering connections to the child's life experiences. The skills include:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** A knowledge that spoken words are made up of sequences of discrete sounds and the ability to manipulate these sounds.
- **Phonics:** The relationship between letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.
- **Word Recognition:** The ability to recognize a word using one or a combination of approaches such as phonics, context clues, semantic clues, syntax clues, or word identification
- **Fluency:** The ability to read accurately and quickly.
- **Vocabulary:** The knowledge of word meanings.
- **Comprehension:** The ability to understand the text.

Validity and Reliability of Research

To ensure that the reading program or programs you are considering are reliable and valid, a literature review can be conducted. Through a rigorous search of the literature using the various electronic search mechanisms, such as Educational Resources Information Center (<http://www.ericec.org>), Educational Abstracts, or Partnership for Reading (<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/index.htm>), you can peruse research articles and other published material regarding your area of interest. Such a literature search can be conducted to serve one of two purposes: 1) identify a variety of reading programs or methodologies, or 2) verify the effectiveness of a program that you are considering. In either case, the following elements should be considered when reviewing the literature:

- **Literature Focus:** Did the article evaluate the impact of the program? Or did it just simply discuss methodology or other aspects of the program?
- **Authorship:** Did the author(s) of the program, related entity, or an independent entity, conduct the research?
- **Sample & Setting:** Was a large sample used in the research? Was the sample comparable (age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, demographic location) to the population you plan to serve with the program? Did the setting in the study reflect your setting?
- **Replicability:** Was the program replicated in different types of settings, including various teachers, schools, and student populations?
- **Program Implementation:** Was the program implemented in a similar manner in which you will implement it? Will you be able to provide a similar amount of professional development and continual support to staff? How much time was dedicated in the study to the program as compared to what you can offer?
- **Results:** Did the program have positive impact on the reading outcomes of children? Were the results of this program compared to results of other programs? Did the children make larger gains than the gains you are currently achieving at your school or district?

Other Factors

In addition to a comprehensive and coherent program that addresses all the key elements of reading, and that is based on sound research, there are other factors that you may want to consider when selecting a program. These factors include:

- **Program Cost:** When examining the cost of the program, look at the cost of materials, professional development, implementation cost (man hours and on going support).
- **Staff Commitment:** Without complete buy-in from staff members, you will have difficulty in full implementation. In a worst-case scenario, you may see staff undermining the program, which may result in failure.
- **Clear Link to State, District and School Standards:** Many states, districts, and even individual schools are developing standards. It is imperative that a program mirrors your standards, allowing teachers to implement the program effectively, while meeting the requirements of the standards.
- **Means of Assessing Student's Current Level of Performance and Progress.** When a program has an integrated means of assessing students' current levels of performance that can gear the instructional content presented, it increases the likelihood that the content is in line with the students' individual needs rather than presented in a uniform manner (e.g., presented at the overall grade-level). Additionally, regular evaluation of students' progress can verify if the instruction methodologies are meeting the learning styles of students. Lastly, it is important that the assessments are in line with state, district, and local standards. When this element is not present, other means of assessment (e.g., curriculum based measures) can be utilized to supplement the program.
- **Engaging Materials and Lessons:** In today's society, teachers have a lot of competition for children's attention. It is imperative that the program is engaging to the child. Some elements of an engaging program are that it uses a variety of teaching methodologies, literature is relevant to the children's lives, and that materials are esthetically pleasing.
- **Sensitive to Individual Student Needs:** A program should have flexibility built in to meet individual needs of students. Keep in mind all the diversity in the classroom, including students who are at-risk, have learning disabilities, are English language learners, or are gifted.
- **Professional Development Opportunities:** One of the biggest barriers to program implementation is lack of staff development. To ensure the success of the program, there need to be ample, well-structured opportunities for staff to learn about the new program, so they will understand and be able to implement its practices and pedagogy. Staff will also need to receive continual support during the implementation of the new program.

Conclusion

A first step in improving reading outcomes for students often is the selection of a reading program. This task can often be overwhelming when school personnel are presented with the vast amount of commercial and noncommercial materials available. We hope that this framework will provide you with a means of selecting a program. It is important to remember that there is no one best program, rather there are many programs available. Your job is to find one that best meets the unique needs of your students.

There are already resources, such as *Putting Reading Front and Center: A Resource Guide for Union Advocacy*, published by the American Federation of Teachers in 2000, and the National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the*

Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction: Reports of the Subgroups, that have used these criteria mentioned above to assess various reading programs. These texts can be useful in choosing reading interventions, but remember to use your own judgement as to the fit between the program and the needs of the students whom you are teaching.

References

American Federation of Teachers (2000). *Putting Reading Front and Center: A Resource Guide for Union Advocacy*. Washington, DC: AFT.

Demarest, T. (2001). Reading Program or Product?
<http://reta.nmsu.edu/reading/resources/articles/program.htm>

Schwartz, A., Shanley, J., and Saunders, J. (2000) *A Guide for Educational Personnel: Selecting an Intervention or Program*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Strickland, C. (1994). Educating African American learners at risk: Finding a better way. *Language Arts* 71, 328-336.

Other Resources

Below are a variety of resources that you may want to view prior to embarking on this endeavor of selecting a reading program. Although EMSTAC does not specifically endorse any of the information provided, we believe that each provide a well-rounded summary of research findings and evaluation of specific programs. Resources are organized by type (websites, books, electronic discussion groups, organizations), each with a short description of its content. Additionally, a list of reading program publishers is included.

Websites

- Scientifically Based Research—U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/research/index.html>) contains transcripts from a seminar addressing the No Child Left Behind Initiative and “scientifically-based research.” During this seminar leading experts discussed the importance of scientifically-based research and its implications for elementary and secondary education.
- Building a Powerful Reading Program: From Research to Practice (<http://www.csus.edu/ier/reading.html>), a document from the Institute for Education Reform at the California State University at Sacramento, examines the current research base along with proven practices for effective literacy.
- What Does Research Say About Reading? (http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/stw_esys/str_read.htm) contains a discussion of cognitive science and cognitive psychology as they relate to reading from the North Central Regional Education Laboratory in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (<http://w3.ed.uiuc.edu/BER/csr/csr.htm>).
- Teaching Reading: A Balanced, Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Reading in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade Three (<http://goldmine.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/teachrd.htm>) is a publication from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in California as an effort to address early

- literacy. This document details specifics of an effective reading program, and includes (1) instructional components, such as phonemic awareness, letter names and shapes, and spelling, (2) examples of classroom practices organized by grade level, (3) diagnostic tools and interventions and (4) instructional guidance and support.
- Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (www.ciera.org) is a national center that focuses on early reading. Their website contains instructional resources, discussion forum, and numerous links to other websites.
 - Mid-Continent Educational Laboratory (<http://www.mcrel.org/resources/literacy/>) outlines developmentally appropriate reading and writing strategies and assessments for young children.
 - National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org), an organization made up of early childhood educators, provides information on promoting excellence in young children through promoting healthy development and constructive education for all children in the young grades. All content areas are addressed in addition to parent and professional development information.
 - National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (www.nichd.nih.gov), part of the National Institutes of Health, has a variety of free resources on reading research. Their mission is “to ensure that every person is born healthy and wanted, that women suffer no harmful effects from the reproductive process, and that all children have the chance to fulfill their potential for a healthy and productive life, free of disease or disability.”
 - Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (www.nwrel.org) provides research and development assistance to education, government, community agencies, business, and labor on high-quality educational programs. Their primary regions of service are to Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.
 - Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, in their Reading Assessment Database for Grades K-2 (<http://www.sedl.org/reading/rad>), describes in detail many of the available early reading assessment (k-2) tools that are commercially published.
 - WETA, through a major grant from the Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov>), Office of Special Education Programs (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/>), started Reading Rockets (<http://www.readingrockets.org/>), a multimedia effort to disseminate research-based information on how to help young, struggling readers.
 - The Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (<http://www.texasreading.org/tcrla/index.htm>) is “an organization dedicated to enhancing reading educators' implementation of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) through professional development and research. The Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts focuses on four areas: professional development, research, evaluation, and the special education reading project.”
 - LD Online (<http://www.ldonline.org/>) is a website that provides information on learning disabilities for parents, teachers, and other professionals. =

Books

American Federation of Teachers (1997). *Learning to read, reading to learn*. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers.

- Adams, M.J. (1999). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.
- Burns, S. M., Griffin, P., & Snow, C. (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- The National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (1996). *Learning to read, reading to learn: helping children with learning disabilities to succeed*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs.
- National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction: Reports of the Subgroups*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health.
- Pressley, M. (1998). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Schickendanz, J. (1999). *Much more than the ABC's*. Washington, DC: National Council for the Education of Young People.
- Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Available on-line at <http://books.nap.edu/books/030906418X/html/R1.html>.

Electronic Discussion Groups

- READPRO offers a thoughtful analysis of issues facing reading professionals. This online discussion forum is devoted to issues facing reading professionals of all types, including reading specialists, elementary or secondary classroom teachers, college professors, librarians or researchers. The emphasis is on practical applications and problem solving, rather than lengthy philosophical debates. To subscribe, go to: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/gninf/readpro.html.

Organizations

- **American Federation of Teachers, AFL•CIO** is an organization that represents many teachers and other education personnel. They publish many materials, including a publication called *What Works: Five Promising Remedial Reading Intervention Programs*, available on-line at <http://www.aft.org/Edissues/whatworks/wwreading.htm>.
Contact Information:
 American Federation of Teachers
 555 New Jersey Ave, NW
 Washington, DC 20001
 Phone: (202) 879-4400
<http://www.aft.org/>
- **Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement** generates & disseminates theoretical, empirical, & practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning & teaching of beginning reading.
Contact Information:

University of Michigan School of Education
610 E University Ave., Rm 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
Tel: (734) 647-6940
Fax: (734) 615-4858
Email: ciera@umich.edu
<http://www.ciera.org/>

- **International Reading Association** is a professional organization that promotes high levels of literacy for all by improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit. Members include classroom teachers, reading specialists, consultants, administrators, supervisors, university faculty, researchers, psychologists, librarians, media specialists, and parents.

Contact Information

800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
Tel: (302) 731-1600
Fax: (302) 731-1057
<http://www.reading.org/>

- **National Reading Panel (NRP)** website has information about NRP publications and materials. These publications include those such as *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, available on-line at <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm>. This Panel of 14 people was instituted to assess the effectiveness of approaches being used to teach children to read.

Contact Information:

The National Reading Panel
6100 Executive Boulevard, Room #4B05
Bethesda, MD 20892-7510
Tel: (301) 496-6591
Fax: (301) 480-7773
<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org>

- **National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement** provides information on what elements of curriculum, instruction, & assessment are essential to developing high literacy & how schools can best help students achieve success.

Contact Information

School of Education, University at Albany
1400 Washington Ave. Albany, NY 12222
Tel: 518/442-5026
Fax: 518/442-5933

Email: cela@albany.edu
<http://cela.albany.edu/>

- **The National Research Council** has a number of publications, including one titled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, available on-line at <http://books.nap.edu/books/030906418X/html/R1.html>.
Contact Information:
2001 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20007
<http://www.nationalacademies.org/nrc/>
- **The Partnership for Reading** offers information about the effective teaching of reading for both children and adults, based on the evidence from quality research.
Contact Information:
National Institute for Literacy
1775 I Street NW, Suite 730
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 233-2025
Fax: (202) 233-2050
<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/index.htm>

Selected Reading Program Publishers

Harcourt-Brace	www.harcourt.com
Houghton-Mifflin	www.hmco.com
Macmillan-McGraw Hill	www.macmillan.com
Open Court	www.opencourt.com
Scholastic	www.scholastic.com
Scott Foresman	www.scottforesman.com
Silver Burdett and Ginn	www.sbgsschool.com
SRA, Inc	www.sra4kids.com