Adolescent Literacy Leadership Forum

Leading for Literacy

A Compendium of Best Practices for Successful Leadership in Adolescent Literacy

ADOLESCENT LITERACY LEADERSHIP FORUM

Leading for Literacy is hosted by the Ohio Resource Center for Mathematics, Science, and Reading and the Ohio Department of Education, Office of Literacy.

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The Ohio Resource Center works to improve teaching and learning among Ohio teachers by promoting standards-based, best practices in mathematics, science, and reading for Ohio schools and universities. The Center's resources are available primarily on the web and are coordinated with other state and regional efforts to improve achievement and teacher effectiveness in K-12 mathematics, science, and reading. To learn more about ORC, visit the website at www.ohiorc.org.

The Ohio Resource Center is a project of the State University Education Deans, funded by the Ohio General Assembly, and established by the Ohio Board of Regents. ORC is located on the campus of the Ohio State University and is affiliated with OSU's College of Education and Human Ecology.

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The Office of Literacy is part of the Ohio Department of Education. The ultimate goal of the Office of Literacy is to help all students become proficient readers. The initiatives from the office communicate research-based practices and attempt to build an awareness and understanding for a richer, broader view of adolescent literacy in schools and communities. The office engages in statewide collaborations with other institutions and agencies. AdLIT is one of many collaborations that bring together a variety of constituents and stakeholders in promoting value for focus on adolescent literacy. For more information, see http://www.ode.state.Oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=890amp;Content=10467.

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Advancing Literacy Instruction Together (AdLIT) is designed to address the unique literacy needs of adolescent learners by promoting and supporting effective, evidence-based practices for classroom instruction and professional development in Ohio's middle and secondary schools.

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Less Is More in Middle and High School Literacy Leadership

BY ROSEMARYE T. TAYLOR

As leadership personnel serving middle and high schools, we may expect too much in literacy learning, and then faculty may not do much of it well. When focusing on leadership to improve achievement of all students, particularly literacy achievement, I have found that if a principal can commit to, support, monitor, and evaluate just a few high-yield expectations, the schools can experience gain fairly rapidly and consistently. Consistency with a few things across the entire faculty is where gain is made, not with only a handful of superstar teachers. Two essential components of schoolwide literacy that provide gain and can be implemented consistently are:

1. Research-based intervention for those reading below grade level
2. Research-based student-owned literacy strategy infusion by all faculty

LITERACY INTERVENTION

Let's consider research-based literacy interventions first. Interventions are not all equal in terms of the reading elements (phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) that they address. Some interventions focus more on phonics and phonemic awareness and some more on fluency or comprehension. There are those that require almost scripted instruction and others that provide flexibility for the teacher to implement based on the students' and teacher's background knowledge. There is no one perfect literacy intervention. The successful intervention matches the literacy learning needs of the target students. Within any group of middle or high school below-grade-level readers, there will be a wide range of literacy learning needs; so it is not surprising that one particular intervention rarely meets the needs of all the striving readers. Successful schools often have a two-tiered intervention approach for the lowest readers and then those reading just below grade level.

After selecting the appropriate interventions for your students, it is essential that their class schedules align with fidelity to the research-based model. Reading coaches share that decision makers provide many reasons why the schedule needed by an intervention won't work (for example, suppose the intervention requires 90 minutes every day, but it will interfere with students taking electives, and students must have electives or the school will lose those teachers and classes). However, the schools that are successful schedule the reading intervention students with the same commitment as they do the Advanced Placement students. All interventions should be implemented with fidelity, monitored for fidelity, and evaluated for fidelity as well as for positive gain. Frequently, when an intervention does not yield the gain expected, the reason is either that there was lack of fidelity to the model or that there was a mismatch between the specific learning need of the target students and the intervention that was chosen. One of the most essential considerations in selecting and monitoring an intervention is whether or not striving readers make more than a year's gain for each gain in school—the growth needed to close the achievement gap.

I have found that if a principal can commit to, support, monitor, and evaluate just a few high-yield expectations, the schools can experience gain fairly rapidly and consistently.

For implementation with fidelity to the research-based model, every teacher of intervention needs initial and ongoing professional development for using the intervention. This would include how to work with the students, organize the classroom, assess

students, group and regroup students, and read diagnostic reports. Ideally, the intervention teacher would receive in-class coaching as the implementation proceeds to ensure success and continuation in the years that follow. This suggestion may seem automatic, but in a district high school reading intervention research project using three different research-based interventions, one of the interventions had virtually no turnover in teachers at the end of the first year and another had almost 100 percent turnover in teachers! Which intervention do you think had the most ongoing support and hence gain in student achievement? Implementing intervention is a difficult challenge for teachers, and so you want to create the environment where the teachers become more expert in the intervention each year.

RESEARCH-BASED STUDENT-OWNED LITERACY STRATEGIES

There are many research-based literacy strategies that teachers can use in instruction before, during, and after reading selected texts. When teachers frame print instruction with before-, during-, and after-reading research-based strategies, students who read two grade levels below the level of the text can comprehend it. Teachers should continue to use the strategies that appear to work for students in instruction. Additionally, I recommend that a school select a handful of easy-to-use research-based literacy strategies to teach, model, and practice with students until students own the strategies. Teaching students to own strategies that they can use during independent reading—homework, pleasure reading, or assessment—is different from having facility with instructional literacy strategies as a teacher. The goal is for students to comprehend texts when the teacher is not present to provide support, such as during high-stakes assessment (Taylor, 2007).

The key literacy strategies that I recommend are:

1. Prediction with evidence
2. Clarification of predictions and reading
3. Summarizing
4. Visualizing
5. Making connections
6. Asking questions
7. Evaluating
8. Using graphic organizers
9. Understanding text structure

The first seven of these strategies require high levels of thinking and are not low-level work. Therefore, when students use these strategies before, during, and after reading, their comprehension increases. Students should be taught to use these strategies to monitor their comprehension.

> *If I don't have a visualization, what should I do? Reread!*
>
> *If I can't make a connection to my life, the world, or something else we've seen or read, what should I do? Reread!*
>
> *If I can't write a one-sentence summary of a section, what should I do? Reread!*

This is what should be taught, modeled, and practiced until students own the strategies and can use them independently to monitor and to enhance comprehension.

Asking questions is the least properly used of the literacy strategies. In visiting over 300 classrooms in 2006 in several states and school districts, I found this strategy to be lacking. Teachers ask most of the questions, and the questions they ask tend to be low-level questions of basic knowledge and simple summarization. In contrast, middle and high school high-stakes assessments focus on higher levels of thinking: application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. In the classrooms visited in 2006, only ten of the teachers were heard asking these levels of questions, and none of these levels were observed on handouts, worksheets, quizzes, or tests. No wonder middle and high school students are not performing well on high-stakes reading assessments! A potential solution to this lack of appropriate questioning on the part of both students and teachers is to ensure that teachers ask high levels of questions verbally and in all printed work, as well as teach high levels of questions to students and expect the students to question in this manner. (For more on teaching high-level questions, see Chapter 6 of *Improving Reading, Writing, and Content Learning for Students in Grades 4-12*, Taylor, 2007).

The last two student-owned literacy strategies listed are tools that teachers use but often do not teach, model, or practice until students own them. Graphic organizers are excellent tools for assisting students to see relationships between ideas and concepts or to make abstract print concrete. However, they are teaching tools that should be modeled so students can use them to enhance comprehension and speak or write about their understanding of the reading.

Understanding text structure is critical for comprehension of various forms of text, both fiction and nonfiction. Throughout the elementary years when students are learning to read, they are introduced primarily to fiction. In contrast to the first six years of schooling, in middle and high school most reading assessments

are based on nonfiction. Therefore, understanding how to access information from nonfiction texts is critical to show gain on high-stakes assessment.

Furthermore, developing the joy of reading nonfiction supports continued reading improvement as well as improvement in vocabulary and comprehension in the content areas. Teachers in all content areas can successfully teach, model, and practice text structure of nonfiction and the joy of nonfiction reading particularly as it relates to their content areas. This is a buy-in strategy for content teachers, but also enhances vocabulary and comprehension development in content areas. Keep in mind that content teachers include the English and language arts teachers, who historically have focused on fiction and must supplement their literature anthology with quality nonfiction to accomplish this expectation. English and language arts teachers need assistance in scaffolding to nonfiction texts, as well as in understanding and employing research-based strategies.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

These expectations cannot be met without ongoing professional development, and it is recommended that this take place at the school level. Keep in mind that one workshop will not be enough. Adults, like students, need to hear the same information in many ways to understand it. Teach, model, and practice is not only for students, but also for teachers. A long-time colleague teacher recently told me, "Rose, I know these things; I have to choose to do them." Close the knowing-doing gap. Follow-up coaching within the classroom setting along with courageously authentic feedback is essential for ongoing improvement (Moxley & Taylor, 2006; Taylor, Chanter, Moxley, & Boulware, 2007).

FINAL THOUGHTS

Less is more. Those in leadership have become overwhelmed with the expectation that in addition to doing everything they have done previously, now they have to be literacy leaders. Teachers become overwhelmed with being asked to consider modifying their instruction to support literacy learning.

Lighten the expectation for you and your teachers by insisting on consistency in teaching, modeling, and practicing student-owned strategies. Focus on high levels of questions by both students and teachers. Monitor classroom teaching, handouts, quizzes, and assessments for research-based literacy strategies including high levels of questions. Regularly spend time in classrooms with a classroom literacy guide to support you in monitoring teachers and in providing feedback (Taylor & Collins, 2003; Taylor & Gunter, 2005).

And don't forget to match the intervention to the students, implement with fidelity to the model, monitor, and evaluate fidelity and effectiveness. Ask the intervention teacher to meet with you monthly to review data on the gain of the students. Recently, a novice administrator told me, "We won't know if it's working until the test results come out in June." June is too late. Change happens in the classroom long before assessment results are provided. If there is no change in the classroom, then there will be no change in assessment data. Ongoing monitoring of these two essential elements during the school year should give you enough data to predict gain on the high-stakes assessment.

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Improving Literacy and Learning at the Middle and High School Level: What Effective Literacy Leaders Know and Do

BY JULIE MELTZER

SCENARIO 1

Scores are flat, and the pressure to raise them is high. But students just don't seem to be engaged. When asked to read or write, many students don't or won't, and it is hard to tell if it is skill or will that is holding them back. Some teachers maintain "high expectations" – and give out lots of low grades. Others enable kids to not read and write by telling them everything they need to "know for the test." Students mostly get through. Meanwhile, it is clear that students who graduate are often not ready for college, citizenship, or the twenty-first century workplace.

SCENARIO 2

Students are actively debating the pros and cons of genetically engineered foods. Next door, students are working in teams to complete water-testing experiments. Down the hall, students are presenting on the economy of alternative fuels, discussing books, writing for the school paper, video conferencing with their elementary reading buddies. Students who are struggling readers are working their way through a technology-based reading program. Struggling writers go by the Learning Lab for help. The atmosphere is pretty upbeat – for a high school. Test scores are rising, and more students are applying to college.

The difference between scenario 1 and scenario 2 is not the students, the school, the neighborhood, or the teachers. It's the leadership. In scenario 2 there is an administrative team that is focused on student motivation, engagement, and achievement; uses data effectively both to design literacy supports and interventions that address students' literacy needs and to monitor students' progress; and actively supports teachers to learn about and implement content-area literacy development.

The literacy leaders I have met often did not start out as knowledgeable about literacy or as advocates for literacy as a lever for educational reform and renewal. But along the way they asked – and answered – a number of key questions that set them on this path. In this article I discuss some of the questions that effective literacy leaders have grappled with and some of the answers that they have discovered that improve students' literacy habits and skills.

RESPONDING TO THE URGENCY

The facts are out there: As many as 6 million students are not reading or writing at grade level (Joftus, 2002); as many as half the students going to college are not able to read their freshmen textbooks (ACT, 2006); and $3 billion was spent by businesses in a recent year on remedial writing courses (National Commission on Writing, 2004). Eighty-nine percent of Hispanic and 86 percent of African American middle and high school students read below grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Every school day more than 7,000 students drop out (Pinkus, 2006). Over half of the adults scoring at the lowest literacy levels are dropouts; however, it is also the case that almost a quarter of those scoring at the lowest literacy levels are actually high school graduates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Students who enter ninth grade in the lowest 25th percent of their class are 20 times more likely to drop out than are the highest-performing students (Carnevale, 2001). There is certainly much "cause for alarm" (Graham & Perin, 2006).

Yet, as is almost always the case, the very different ways that school leaders have chosen to respond to this crisis yield vastly different results. Leadership seems to be the key factor in whether two schools that serve similar populations of students yield to these statistics as inevitable – or rise above them.

At its root, literacy is personal. The competence and confidence of those who feel able to read, write, and speak as needed across settings positively affects their identity and sense of efficacy no matter what they choose to do for work or in life. Those with weak literacy skills or literacy skills that are suited only to very specific

types of reading, writing, or speaking often feel more limited and believe that there is much they cannot do. As is the case with most groups of people, within a group of school leaders there is a range of how people feel about their own reading and writing skills. Many leaders tell me that they were avid readers who enjoyed many types of books and want students to have a similar passion for reading. Others tell me that they were reluctant or struggling readers themselves and that they do not want students to avoid reading as they did. I often ask leaders if they want students to be readers and writers like they were in high school. If the answer is yes, I ask them to think about the conditions and supports that need to be put into place at school to make that happen. If the answer is no, I ask them to think about the conditions and supports necessary to prevent current students from feeling as they did when they were in school. Either way, significant action is required.

Leaders who understand that a comprehensive response is required are those who make sure that "business as usual" is interrupted. These leaders become passionate spokespeople for ensuring that schools become motivating environments for learning, where students are engaged in reading and writing for authentic purposes and receive high-level reading and writing instruction within the context of content-area learning. They understand the connections between motivation, engagement, and achievement and between engagement and instruction. They view their teachers – of math, social studies, business, science, art – as students' literacy coaches, assisting students to develop their potentials as readers, writers, and thinkers because that is their job. Wasting time and dismissing the potential of students are not acceptable responses. For these leaders, literacy improvement is *personal*.

IMPLEMENTING A VISION

What would it look like if our literacy improvement initiative was successful? What would students be doing differently? What would teachers be doing differently? How would the environment be different?

These are questions that are important to ask – and answer – collaboratively. The answers provide clear ideas about the place to start and next steps. For example, if teachers plan to talk about students' progress and about instruction, then teacher book study groups, common planning time, and timely access to data about students as readers become priorities. If changing the culture of the school to be more supportive of reading, writing, and thinking emerges as key, then instigating book commercials, a sustained silent reading program, book clubs, "get caught reading" campaigns, literacy-focused activities (grade-level "reads," poetry jams, rap contests with the words of the week, speech contests, book-based movie events) might be the way forward. If students will be reading more and asking more questions and be more actively engaged with learning, then teacher professional development focused on interactive strategies for developing students' literacy habits and skills is in order.

The vision has to be shared with, engaged in by, and communicated broadly to students, teachers, parents, and the community. If leaders want students to be motivated and engaged, they need to motivate and engage teachers and the community on their behalf.

The vision also has to be accompanied by measurable goals that define how the school will know that progress is being made. Action steps need to be outlined so people will see that a plan is in place. It is likely that action steps will need to be taken in a variety of domains to truly support literacy improvement. For example, how resources, structures, policies, and procedures do or do not support literacy development will need to be examined. If current schedules prevent common planning time, or there are no literacy coaches or specialists on staff, or there is inadequate or irrelevant teacher professional development, or testing policies mean that the only measure of student progress never comes out during the school year, changes will likely need to occur!

USING THE DATA

What do we know about our students as readers and writers, and how do we know it? And – as importantly – what do we do with that knowledge?

There are at least six sources of data about our students as readers and writers – and each provides different information. State assessments, leveled reading tests, diagnostic reading tests, standardized reading or writing assessments, classroom or end-of-grade/course assessments, and district-wide assessments (e.g., writing prompts) – all tell something about students' proficiencies as readers and, sometimes, as writers and thinkers. Using multiple sources of data to understand literacy teaching and learning requires understanding what the data mean and if the data will answer the questions you have about students, about interventions, and about content-area literacy instruction.

Effective literacy leaders seem to be using data in some similar ways:

- In some schools when students enter at sixth, seventh, or ninth grade or transfer into the school, they are immediately evaluated through a reading assessment. If

scores are very low, a follow-up diagnostic assessment is administered. Then, depending on the resulting reader profile, the student is given a schedule that allows time to participate in an appropriate intervention class.

- More and more schools are using computer-based reading tests at the beginning and end of the year to monitor students' progress. Leaders want to make sure that students reading on grade level make a year's worth of gain and that students reading below grade level make more than a year's worth of gain. Students at risk are tested midyear as well to see if progress is being made or additional support is needed.
- Some schools have moved to group or computer-based diagnostic tests in the first place to provide a better picture of their students as readers.
- At some schools, teachers get time on a regular basis to use a collaborative protocol to examine student work and discuss together how to best respond to students' identified needs as readers and writers.
- Some school leaders are disaggregating their data to ensure that they are able to follow intact cohorts of students to see how their program is supporting learners with different needs.
- Some schools hold monthly data meetings to see how students are doing based on classroom assessment grades. Instructional intervention is discussed when students' progress is unsatisfactory.
- Some school leaders are doing literacy walk-throughs and reporting the results of the walk-throughs back to teachers. This feedback loop assures teachers that leaders notice and are focused on implementation of strategies and instructional approaches learned through teacher professional development.
- Small schools are developing individualized reading plans for all students; large schools are doing this for all students who are struggling readers. These individualized profiles are communicated to teachers and reviewed quarterly to make sure students are getting the assistance they need.

Having good data in a timely fashion allows school leaders to design and implement targeted interventions that are likely to make a positive difference for students. Students who struggle with decoding may need focused attention on structured word work, but students who have issues related to comprehension are likely need a very different intervention program. Literacy development is complex, and so it is important to make sure that multiple data points are used for placement decisions and progress monitoring. For example, checking the validity of unexpectedly high or low scores on reading tests by asking teachers of those students about their classroom performance is important to really understand these students as readers and learners.

Having good data also allows school leaders to tell their story – to spotlight the progress of specific groups of students as a result of actions taken by the school, thereby generating more enthusiasm and buy-in for the ongoing literacy improvement initiative. When the news is not so positive, effective leaders use the data to communicate what is going on and to gain support for what needs to happen next.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

How do we make sure that professional development is not wasted? How do we help teachers translate what they learn in professional development back into the classroom?

Teachers cannot teach what they themselves do not know. Ongoing teacher professional development is key to a literacy improvement initiative. For many reasons, most middle and high school teachers – including English teachers – do not know how to effectively use reading and writing as vehicles for learning in the content-area classroom.

One or two days of literacy workshops are not sufficient to support instructional change. Effective literacy professional development is ongoing and addresses a variety of learning styles. Such professional development would include whole faculty and team/content-area workshops, modeling, content-area examples, time for planning and application, coaching and/or peer coaching options, and time for strategy sharing and dissemination.

LITERACY ACROSS THE CONTENT AREAS *OR* STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS?

The answer, found again and again in schools where increasing numbers of students are successful, is both. In fact, when colleagues and I recently looked across several schools where there was a "focus on literacy" to determine what made the difference for students, we found that schools that had just focused on one or the other, even at a reasonable level of implementation, did not see gains in scores. But schools that implemented both typically saw gains.

For example, one large high school that implemented a focused intervention for 45 freshmen saw the scores of these students rise but saw no impact on their overall performance.

It is likely that even as these students improved their reading skills, others, without targeted assistance, lost ground. Another school started a silent sustained reading program twice a week and provided content-area literacy professional development but saw no gains. A third school implemented targeted reading intervention classes, sustained silent reading on a daily basis, and a focus on vocabulary and reading comprehension in all content areas. Their scores went up.

FOCUSING ON THE FOUR Es CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

How do we get everyone on board? Especially those who seem to be resistant?

My colleagues and I have observed that leaders who focus on the four Es – environment, engagement, expectations, and encouragement/support – seem to have greater success with getting people on board to the literacy improvement initiative. Part of this may be that these leaders have worked with the principle that teachers need to be motivated and engaged if a literacy improvement effort is to succeed. These leaders pay attention to what motivates and engages people to learn and sustain involvement with a new activity. It turns out that the same conditions that encourage and allow struggling readers and writers to put forth effort and improve their literacy habits and skills can be paralleled in the literacy improvement effort as a whole – with positive results.

Take the mini-assessment offered in Figure 1. See which of the Es are strong at your school – and represent strengths to build upon – and which need attention. This might give you some good ideas of where and how to start to build consensus that literacy needs to be a central focus of a schoolwide improvement effort.

NEXT STEPS

You have heard it before: Life is a journey, not a destination. So it is with embarking on a schoolwide literacy improvement initiative. Utilizing the strategies and approaches mentioned in this article to support your efforts can galvanize action and sustain momentum.

Getting all students to be able to read, write, and think using multiple texts and for multiple purposes across content areas is no small task. It requires dedication, vision, focus, and stamina to cultivate a culture of data-driven decision making, support teacher professional development, and provide expectations and accountability to ensure that ongoing content-area literacy development is occurring and that all students who need extra support are getting effective intervention targeted to their needs. You cannot do it alone. But together with a capable team, you can set the tone, establish the agenda, and make it happen. Once the journey is begun in earnest, the results will begin to speak for themselves.

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FIGURE 1

In our work with middle and high schools at the Center for Resource Management we've discovered four key issues that affect teacher motivation and engagement to implement literacy instruction in their classrooms. Assess your own school by marking each item on the checklist using the following code:

★ This is strongly in place at our school.

✔ This is somewhat in place but could be improved.

✖ This is an area where we need to focus.

1. ENVIRONMENT

Environment refers to the structural, climatic, cultural, and physical conditions for teaching and learning within which a focus on literacy across the content areas is taking place. Environment has a forceful and often overlooked impact on the willingness or reluctance of individuals to participate in new initiatives.

Checklist:

___ Our school is a safe place for teachers to try out new approaches.

___ When you walk into our school, it is easy to tell that literacy is a focus.

___ Teachers are used to doing peer observations, team teaching, and peer coaching, and there is a structure to support this in our school.

___ Teacher talk is often focused on instruction and student learning.

___ The school's mission and vision is taken seriously by all staff members, and within the mission and vision is an explicit connection to literacy.

2. ENGAGEMENT

Engagement refers to the direct connection between the individual and the task at hand. In the case of content teachers, engagement relates to how literacy is seen as central or vital to their interests or goals as teachers.

Checklist:

___ Teachers across the content areas see literacy development as central to their job, and they take responsibility for improving their abilities in this area.

___ Teachers across the content areas understand how literacy relates to content-area learning and believe that helping students become independent learners is a central part of their role as a teacher.

___ Teachers understand that their content area has challenging reading, writing, and presentation and discourse requirements, and they are interested in helping students meet the literacy demands of their content area.

___ Students feel that they are competent readers and writers, and almost all are willing to complete content-area assigned reading and writing tasks. Teachers are not frustrated by the lack of student reading and writing skills or student resistance to reading and writing. Teachers feel they have many strategies to assist struggling readers and writers.

___ Students use multiple strategies to learn from challenging texts and are largely independent learners. Teachers do not feel they are working harder than the students.

___ Teachers understand that use of the literacy strategies will enable more students to learn more content over the course of the year. Teachers do not feel that they must make a trade-off between teaching literacy skills and teaching content and that they cannot afford the time to do both.

___ Students are given multiple opportunities weekly across the content areas to use reading and writing to learn. Teachers do not enable students to not read and write by relying primarily on lecture, hands-on projects, and video instead of reading and writing to learn.

3. EXPECTATIONS

Expectations refer to what an individual will be held accountable for. While expectations can be either internal or external, in this case they are what the school, departmental, grade level, or team teaching colleagues; and the principal, and the union (if applicable), expect of teachers with regard to integration of literacy support and development into content-area learning.

Checklist:

___ There are clear expectations that teachers will use specified literacy strategies.

___ Administrators hold teachers accountable for the frequent use of literacy strategies in content-area teaching and learning.

___ Course descriptions include literacy expectations.

___ Courses are well supported with a variety of teaching texts.

___ All core content, special education, and foreign language teachers are required to participate in some form of content-area literacy teacher professional development. Teachers of other content areas are encouraged to participate as well.

___ Students are assessed in reading at the beginning and end of the year or the beginning of each year, and results are reported back to the faculty.

4. ENCOURGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Encouragement and support refer to what is often necessary to help individuals feel comfortable enough to try new things and be willing to persevere when initial attempts are unsuccessful or more challenging than anticipated.

Checklist:

___ Teachers feel comfortable asking for help from colleagues and the literacy coach to improve their skills in supporting content-area literacy development.

___ Teachers have a variety of ways available to them to improve their skills in supporting content-area literacy development.

___ Teachers feel that they have obtained and can obtain needed support materials.

___ There are vehicles for teachers to meet and discuss the successes and challenges of strategy implementation. Teachers feel that everyone is on a journey of improving his or her skills in this area and that it is okay to be at a beginning point.

___ There are resources, programs, and structures in place at the school to address the needs of really struggling readers and writers. Teachers know what these are and that they are accessible.

READY, SET, GO:

Now you're ready to work with your school literacy team to identify three to five strategies that you will use to improve teacher commitment to and ownership of the literacy focus and literacy action plan at your school.

The Four Es Checklist. (Copyright 2006. PCG-CRM retains copyright on all graphics, figures, and charts and grants permission to AdLIT to use these for this article.)

What's a Principal to Do?

BY MELVINA PHILLIPS

Too often, school leaders at the secondary level hear the dreaded statement, "Teaching reading is not my job," when the discussions initially focus on creating a schoolwide literacy initiative. Teachers commit several years preparing to learn and teach the content of a subject dearly loved, but the thought of teaching reading and writing within content classes is not a focus of preservice classes, nor is it connected to the philosophy of teaching a core content class by most middle and high school teachers. Donna Ogle described the feelings well in an interview with Marcia D'Arcangelo:

A lot of secondary teachers enter the field because of their passion for what they are teaching. It's an unusual teacher who comes into secondary education wanting to teach students how to learn. Yet, if we're going to be good teachers, that's really essential. (D'Arcangelo, 2002, p. 13)

The task for school leaders is to generate interest in adolescent literacy and begin the conversations connected with initiating a schoolwide literacy initiative. The conversations should focus on improving student learning and successfully integrating literacy strategies into daily instructional practices. Thus, the question for school leaders becomes, *How am I to create a school culture to best support teachers as we collaboratively develop a literacy-rich environment for students?*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION

As a former principal, I often heard teachers bemoan the fact that students did not read well enough to be successful in the core content classes. At our school, this dialogue led to a more intensive evaluation of students' reading and writing abilities, and the teachers came to the realization that performance in content classes could only be improved if students had the skills to read, write, and think more deeply about texts. Even though we knew the students needed additional support, there was an obviously sad fact that we shared with many other secondary educators – the skills to embed literacy strategies into daily instructional practices were missing. This challenge is encountered by many secondary leaders as efforts are made to improve adolescent literacy at middle and high schools.

Professional development to learn high-impact content-area literacy strategies is a beginning point. Teachers need to gain a working knowledge of strategies that will best support students as they read and engage with text. Not only is it important to learn the strategies, but it is also extremely important to understand how to effectively use literacy strategies to help students read and comprehend the tough expository text of the social studies, science, and math books, while also understanding the narrative text of literature books. It is not enough to use a strategy occasionally. Teachers support increased student literacy by daily using instructional strategies that connect the purposes of before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading strategies (see Figure 1).

When designing a professional development plan to support a schoolwide literacy initiative, carefully con-

FIGURE 1

Strategic teaching and critical connections are made when teachers' instructional practices connect before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading literacy strategies.

BEFORE READING

Purpose of before-reading strategies:
- To activate prior knowledge
- To set a purpose for reading
- To select appropriate literacy strategies

Literacy strategy examples:
- Oral previews
- Vocabulary strategies
- Anticipation guides
- Brainstorm
- KWL

DURING READING

Purpose of during-reading strategies:
- Focus attention
- Organize and integrate new information
- Self-monitor comprehension
- Use text structure
- Use context clues

Literacy strategy examples:
- Chunk the text
- Grand conversations
- Reciprocal teaching
- SQ3R
- QAR
- Double-entry journals
- Venn diagram

AFTER READING

Purpose of after-reading strategies:
- Reflect on what was read
- Summarize main ideas
- Extend learning
- Seek additional information

Literacy strategy examples:
- RAFT
- I-search projects
- Magnet summary
- Comparison/contrast writing or thinking activity
- Quick write
- Anticipation/reaction guide

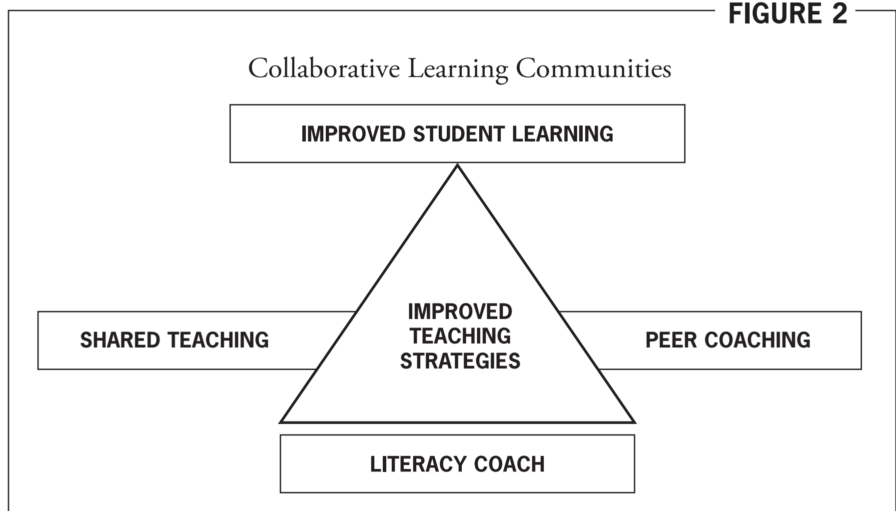
What should a principal see in a literacy-rich classroom? (*Adapted from Fuentes, 1998.*)

sider the needs of each staff member since each content teacher will have varying levels of knowledge connected with literacy instruction. Collaboratively plan with your literacy leadership team a professional development agenda that is tailored to the needs of your staff based on an analysis of teacher surveys, formal and informal observations, and current research of best literacy practices.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A ONE-SHOT DEAL

Initial professional development provides the beginning baby steps toward a successful adolescent literacy initiative; yet you and the literacy leadership team must also address the ongoing need to support staff as they try to implement literacy strategies into daily instructional practices. There should be opportunities to add additional literacy strategies to the teachers' repertoire of skills, but the most important task is to institute some form of coaching to support teachers as they continuously strive to perfect literacy instructional practices.

A literacy coach's primary responsibility is to support core content teachers as they perfect instructional literacy strategies that support increasing student learning. The collaboration among teachers and the literacy coach develops an atmosphere of sharing and learning. Coaching support leads to better planning of instruction and assists teachers to more effectively organize class time to improve reading for understanding (International Reading Association, 2006). The support of the literacy coach is one layer of an effective coaching model, but the opportunity to build capacity of the staff as they become proficient with the use of literacy strategies adds the next layer of support through peer coaching and shared teaching experiences. A graphic of a coaching model that has been effective in some of the secondary Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) schools can be seen in Figure 2. This model depicts a scaffold of coaching support, with the ultimate goal of improved teacher performance and student achievement.



Coaching Model (*Source: Melvina Phillips, Alabama Reading Initiative, Secondary Team, 2005*)

SCHEDULES AND STRUCTURES PROVIDE THE ENVIRONMENT

Ongoing professional development and coaching efforts are only effective if there is adequate time built into the school schedule for crucial teacher interaction and deep discussion connected with instructional practices. Teachers need the opportunity to talk and plan lessons together, while adding literacy strategies to the instructional mix. The literacy coach and teachers can only understand the support needed to improve instruction if they have the time to assess student progress and their own instructional practices. Your responsibility as a literacy leader is to provide a schedule supportive of common planning time and assure there are opportunities during the day for small-group and individual coaching sessions. During these sessions the coach will have time to explicitly model the strategy and work with teachers to practice the use of the strategy in actual classrooms. There should also be time for reflection and feedback, with the goal always connected with improving instructional practices and student performance.

The schedule is only effective if there are expectations from you that common planning time will be used effectively. To begin the process, it is often necessary to work with team leaders, department chairs, and literacy and peer coaches to design an agenda with specific outcomes in mind. There are several critical questions to consider to assure the time will be used wisely:

1. Will the time be used to assess student progress and determine instructional requirements for improving student achievement?
2. How will coaching be built into this time to support lesson planning that includes literacy strategies?
3. What are the expectations for completed lesson plans and units designed to include literacy instructional practices?
4. Can this time be used for professional book studies connected to improving knowledge about literacy instructional practices?

5. Will there be time for the literacy coach and peer coaches to explicitly model literacy strategies?
6. Will the teachers use this time to plan lessons with a peer and schedule follow-up shared teaching experiences to integrate literacy strategies and time to reflect about teacher practices and student engagement during the lesson?
7. How will you support the teachers with the necessary resources to effectively use this time?

ACCOUNTABILITY TO ASSURE SUCCESS

Professional development and coaching are only one thread of developing a schoolwide literacy initiative. Ongoing evaluation of instructional practices and student achievement is vital to determine if the practices are effective. Planning and scheduling for ongoing progress monitoring require a commitment that you and the literacy leadership team should consider as a vital component of the literacy plan.

Formal and informal observations are important aspects of teacher evaluations, but this is only one level. To develop a collaborative assessment of practices, it is best to involve teachers in the process. This can often be accomplished with literacy walks. The team of teachers and administrators should conduct literacy walks weekly or biweekly for the process to be effective. Before taking the literacy walk, determine what you want to observe as you visit classrooms. Will the walk focus on environmental supports for literacy such as class libraries, student small-group settings, or student work displays? Will you search for the embedding of literacy instructional practices? If so, what will be your focus? Will it be pre-, during-, and post-literacy strategies? Are you looking for student engagement? Is explicit teaching the focus of the literacy walk? All these are important to determine prior to the visits, but how you collect the data and what you do with the data are also important.

Some literacy leaders use a simple tally sheet to determine the number of observed literacy practices. For instance, if the team visits ten classrooms, and you only see evidence of the desired literacy practice in two of the ten classrooms, this is a red flag for additional professional development or additional encouragement to implement the practice. A literacy walk provides a quick snapshot into actual classroom practices.

As a principal, I visited classrooms daily to provide teachers support, but I also wanted to evaluate effectiveness and connections of literacy instructional practices and student engagement. I particularly wanted to see teachers explicitly modeling how to effectively use literacy strategies. Students do not learn from assigning, but from explicit teaching and modeling. For instance, will a student understand how to write a summary better if it is assigned, or will summarization be better understood if the teacher explicitly models how to develop a summary? I developed a quick observation form that I used for data collection and for follow-up feedback and reflection (see Figure 3).

You probably have data collection tools you use, but the important aspect of any tool is how it is used for follow-up discussions and reflections for improvement of instruction. A tool is just a tool unless it is truly used for improvement.

Regular data meetings to discuss student progress and the success of or disconnect with instructional practices are a must of any literacy initiative. Teachers should discuss literacy strategies that are encouraging increased student understanding and learning of core content standards. Student work samples and teacher anecdotal records of student practices provide a deeper understanding of instruction and if instruction is actually supporting student learning. The collaborative nature of the data meetings provides a voice of each professional to evaluate student progress and additional opportunities for improving instruction.

SCHOOL LITERACY LEADERS PROVIDE THE GLUE

Frequently, we think a literacy initiative requires only purchasing a research-based program or hiring a reading specialist to work with struggling readers. Too often, we fall into the trap of thinking that these steps will provide the solution for addressing issues connected to adolescent literacy. Yet research has proved, time and again, that those two elements are only part of the solution. School leadership is "second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). How leaders decide to support teachers with opportunities to learn and successfully embed literacy into daily instruction is one of the most critical ingredients of a successful literacy project. It is important to remember that change begins with a vision, and a successful literacy initiative requires your active involvement. You are the key to literacy success at your school.

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FIGURE 3

Observational Guide

NAME: ____________________

DATE: ____________________

TEACHER BEHAVIORS

Using explicit instructional strategies:
- o Teaching/modeling/using reading strategy
- o Guided reading activity
- o Shared reading activity
- o Read-aloud
- o Other

Using a visual or graphic organizer to guide student interaction with text

Using technology (PPT, Internet research, intervention) to foster student learning

Making connections of prereading, during reading, and post-reading strategies to support student learning of content

Supporting the reading-writing connection:
- o Using graphic organizers to help students visually represent concepts from text
- o Modeling how to extend graphic organizers into written mode
- o Other

Encouraging higher-order thinking through:
- o Deep questioning (QAR, etc.)
- o Group activities and responses to extended questions, topics, and research
- o Other

Providing opportunities for students to learn from one another:
- o Cooperative groups
- o Jigsaws
- o Peer to peer
- o Other

Using small-group instruction to assist struggling students and differentiated learning

Utilizing classroom to support learning and literacy:
- o Word walls
- o Student work displayed
- o Reading center

COMMENTS

STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Students actively engaged with learning activities:
- o Reading
- o Writing
- o Listening
- o Discussing
- o Investigating

Students working in small groups

Students not engaged

FOLLOW-UP CONFERENCE / NEXT STEPS:

Starting Professional Conversations

BY JAN GOODWIN

Have you ever had a day like this?

> Five discipline problems are sitting in the office, waiting for your attention.
>
> An upset parent is on the phone, complaining about how a teacher handled a situation with a student.
>
> A teacher is at your door and wants to talk about the fantastic conference she just attended and the ideas she is convinced will make a difference for her struggling readers.
>
> And on top of all this, you have a staff meeting to plan for tomorrow morning. You have made a commitment to your staff to transform staff meetings into opportunities for professional conversations and professional development and get away from the nuts-and-bolts issues that can be handled by email. (By the way, you have about ten or twelve of those nuts and bolts floating around your desk on notes, but you haven't had time to write the memo.)

Although you have the best of intentions, sometimes it's easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day "stuff," and you tend to lose sight of why you're there—to provide the best education possible for your students. It would be so easy to just decide tomorrow's staff meeting will be devoted to going over all those notes on your desk, and you'll make the next meeting the one for professional conversations. But then you remember the same thing happened last month, and you can see yourself falling back into old habits.

Wouldn't your life be a little easier if there were some resources available to assist in getting those professional conversations started? Wouldn't it be great if you could model some instructional approaches for your staff that would not only help them begin to dialogue about what's really important in school but also serve as a nudge for them to try a similar approach with their students?

Some strategies you can use to start the professional conversations have been collected and will be made available in the AdLIT section of the Ohio Resource Center (ORC) website (http://www.ohiorc.org/adlit). These strategies are intended to serve as "mini-PD sessions" that will take 10 to 20 minutes and can be used during staff meetings. Not only will they help you get rich conversations started, but they can also serve as models for your teachers of ways they might better engage their students in reading and discussion in their classrooms.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE FOR SHARING A PROFESSIONAL ARTICLE

Say, at your next staff meeting, you want to introduce an article you read in one of your professional journals that you think has some great ideas in it about teaching writing across the content areas. You realize that your students are not performing well on short-answer and extended-response questions on the state tests, and you think this article might help them. How can you share the information with your staff so they will reflect on their own practices and begin to make some changes?

You might start by using an anticipation guide. You can begin to create the guide by selecting five to ten key ideas from the article that you would like your staff to consider. Write a statement about each idea. Some of the statements should be worded so the writer of the article would agree with them, and some should be stated so the writer would not agree with them. Try to write statements that may create some controversy and lead to good discussion. Before distributing the article, ask your staff to mark whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Take a few minutes for small groups to discuss their ideas about the statements.

Now pass out the article and ask the staff to read it silently. When they are finished, ask them to go back through each of the statements and mark whether they agree or disagree with them now. Allow the same small groups to discuss changes in thinking that may have taken place as a result of reading the article.

Then have each group share one key idea from the article the group members think might be useful as they plan instruction in the future.

Make a list of these ideas, and later distribute them to the entire staff.

Wrap things up by going back to the anticipation guide. Discuss how it was useful to the staff as they began to read the article and again after they finished the reading. Hopefully, someone will mention that the anticipation guide helped them set a purpose for their reading. They were curious to see if they agreed or disagreed with what the author was going to say. This made them a little more interested in reading the article. The anticipation guide also helped them know what was important in this article. They were able to focus on the points raised through the anticipation guide.

Next ask the staff what they experienced through the use of the anticipation guide that might be transferred to their own classroom instruction. Might an anticipation guide help some of their struggling readers determine what's important in a reading assignment? Could such a guide be used in a science class? A social studies class? Could it serve as a motivation to help some students get through a reading assignment? What about the discussion that ensued around the statements on the anticipation guide? Could students also have some discussions based on statements on an anticipation guide? If they are asked to support their ideas, would that pay off when it comes time to write a short answer or extended response on a state test?

Once your staff have decided that the anticipation guide might be useful as a strategy to use with their students, quickly share with them how you created it and things to think about when writing the statements. You may want to distribute a brief handout on how to create and use an anticipation guide.

USING A FISHBONE TO ANALYZE CAUSE AND EFFECT

Suppose, for another staff meeting, you want your staff to spend time analyzing some of the obstacles that get in the way of student achievement in your building. You have found an article that addresses issues related to educating non-English-speaking students. Over the past few years your building has seen an increase in the number of English language learners (ELLs), and you have a need to address this population in relation to AYP. You feel that your staff will benefit from reading this article because of their lack of understanding of the issues surrounding students who are just learning English. If your staff better understand these students, they will be able to make more informed instructional decisions about educating them.

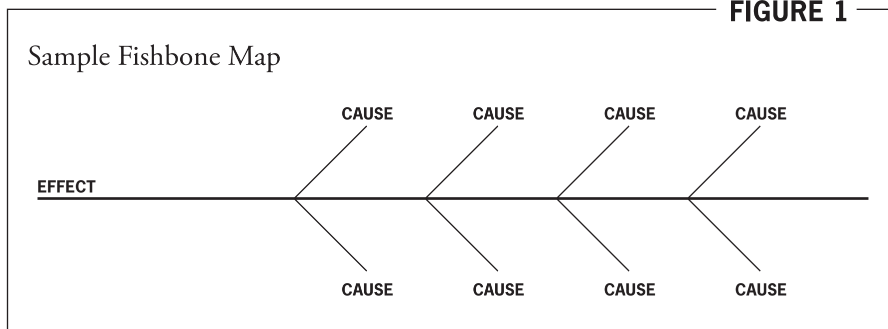
Start by distributing copies of the fishbone diagram (see Figure 1), and share with your staff how it is organized. The effect is written at one end of the "fish," and the causes form the "spines" of the fish. You may even want to show one that has been completed so they can visualize the types of things that are written on the diagram. Then tell them that today you will be using this diagram to help outline some of the causes related to ELL students' not passing the achievement tests. Distribute the article, and ask the staff to fill in the effect—ELL students are not passing the achievement tests. Then tell them that they are to identify causes of this problem that are outlined in the article they are to read. You may want to note to participants that they might not have every spine line filled in or they may need to add more, depending on what they find in the article. Tell each group to be ready to report out what it has read that may be causing this problem.

After groups have a chance to discuss the causes, ask each group to share one of the causes it found in the article. Record these on an overhead of the fishbone map. You may wish to make a copy of the completed fishbone map and distribute it to the staff. Future meetings might address some of these causes in an attempt to find ways to better meet the needs of these students.

Once again, at the end of your time together, allow the staff to discuss how they might use a similar strategy in their classroom with their students. What are the benefits of using a fishbone diagram? For what type of reading might it be helpful? When would it not be a good choice? Share a brief handout with your staff on how to use the fishbone, and give them each a template they can use in their classrooms.

FIGURE 1

Sample Fishbone Map



PLANNING THE DISCUSSIONS

Obviously, you know your school in a way nobody else knows it. It is impossible to create a completely generic staff development plan that is appli-

cable to all middle and high schools. However, there are some basic strategies that could be used in many of these buildings. You must select your own topics for professional development, but it is conceivable that some strategies can be collected and organized in a way you can use them in staff meetings with minimal planning.

Several professional development session outlines like those discussed in this article have been created using materials from the Ohio Resource Center and will be made available on the AdLIT portion of the Ohio Resource Center's website. Each of the sessions includes the following:

- Overview of the strategy
- Resources needed
- Preparation
- Procedure
- Handouts
- Classroom connections
- Links to sites that contain more information about the strategy

These modules for professional development have been designed to help you get started. They can be altered to meet the needs of your staff, but they should all serve as models of good instructional practices that can be transferred into classroom practices by the teachers. Keep an eye out for articles you can use as you are reading professional journals. Then select a module that fits with your selected article and is pertinent to the professional growth of your staff.

Jan Goodwin, recently retired from South-Western City Schools in Franklin County as the K-12 Language Arts Coordinator, is currently working as an independent educational consultant. She focuses on instructional practices that will enhance student achievement and has been exploring the concept of literacy coaches for secondary schools.

Standards-Based Instruction for Adolescents with Special Needs: Looking for Ways to Turn All Students into Engaged Readers and Capable Writers

BY HARRIET FAYNE AND ADELE WEISS

PREAMBLE

We all know who these students are. They are the ones who take the shine off our golden apples, make us feel frustrated and then make us feel angry with ourselves for feeling frustrated, and cause us to question our teaching effectiveness. These students, many of whom have been identified as having special needs and placed on IEPs, are coming into our middle and high school content-area classrooms with increasing frequency at a time when there is intense pressure to raise academic standards, improve test scores, and get students ready to be successful in college or the workplace.

So we search for reasons for their poor behavior or achievement. "Oh, that explains it. Johnny is LD, or ED, or… (fill in the blank with an acronym from the alphabet soup of special education)." Regardless of the diagnostic label that accompanies each special needs adolescent, there are seven general problem areas identified by Davis and Grossen (2001) that characterize "vulnerable learners" (p. 12): slow learning rates, language deficits, memory deficits, lack of automatic basic skills, attention difficulties, poor attitudes and motivation, and limited prior knowledge. While we do not have a magic elixir that will make all these problems disappear, we do hope to provide you with some practical, evidence-based strategies that will allow you to achieve success with special needs students. Of course, the first step in choosing strategies for your students is to determine their needs.

KNOWING YOUR STUDENTS: ASSESS, DON'T ASSUME

"You are in eighth grade. Of course you should be able to read ____"

"I can't believe that you are in eleventh grade and still don't know how to ____"

"If you tried, you could understand ____"

"How do you expect to pass the OGT if you can't ____"

"Since you learned about ____ last year, this should be easy."

Sound familiar? We teachers make a lot of assumptions based on students' chronological age and grade placement. While we can blame parents, other teachers, or the students themselves when we find that our expecta-

tions don't match reality, there are more productive approaches to take.

To eliminate false assumptions and to end the blame game, we need to use that dreaded "A" word, *assessment*. Don't worry. We are not talking about high-stakes testing. The assessment tools that we think will help you to get to know your students are formative in nature and largely informal and teacher-designed.

Cumulative records are available to give teachers background information on their students; in addition, intervention specialists have folders on students with IEPs that they can share. Despite the fact that there are files full of test scores, reports, and anecdotal records, there is still something to be said for collecting your own assessment data. Secondary teachers, however, usually have too many students on their rosters and too much to accomplish to be able to conduct elaborate informal assessments, let alone to score and interpret them. How can teachers get to know their students quickly and efficiently at the beginning of the school year?

By dedicating a limited amount of class time to collecting baseline data, teachers can figure out where their students fit along a reading continuum. If, for example, you present adolescents with characteristics of different types of readers (enthusiastic, proficient, reluctant/unmotivated, and struggling), they will tell you (either orally or in writing) which label best describes them. You might choose instead to observe students, using a rubric (see *The Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide.* Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.). Literacy autobiographies, which ask students to "retrace the steps of their reading life and identify those events or people that helped turn them on or off to reading" (Burke, 2000, p. 11), and reading attitude/interest surveys (Hildebrandt, 2001) are other good ways to glean a wealth of information. Once you identify the struggling readers, pull them aside individually and ask them to read aloud so that you can apply a fluency scale (Read Naturally, 2006). You can also keep track of a student's oral reading performance with the reading assessment calculator (Liverpool Schools, n.d.). If your schedule makes individualized follow-up impossible, seek assistance from an intervention specialist who is assigned to the special needs students in your classroom.

PRETEACH AND RETEACH: BOLSTERING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY

Background Knowledge. Insufficient or inaccurate background knowledge compounds other types of difficulties that impact on academic achievement. To "backfill" the knowledge base of special needs adolescents, educators can use both print and nonprint materials. Previewing text in a systematic fashion using a prereading notes template (Greece Central School District, n.d.-b) is one way to give students opportunities to construct their own knowledge. Teacher read-alouds of an introductory passage or a related article and follow-up discussion at the beginning of a unit will also get students off to a good start. Media offer a number of possibilities as well. Films and TV documentaries provide visual images that will serve as memory hooks.

While all the techniques we have just described are effective, it is important to remember that direct experience is by far the most powerful teacher. Therefore, whenever it is feasible to do so, use a hands-on activity, a field trip, or problem-based learning to establish a sound foundation in your subject area.

Vocabulary. Learning content-area vocabulary is a key to success in most secondary classrooms. Explicit teaching of terminology that students will encounter in their reading will make a critical difference. Teachers should always be looking for new and intriguing ways to teach vocabulary. A variety of evidence-based routines are available on Just Read Now (Beacon Learning Center, n.d.), an online resource center aligned with Florida's academic content standards.

Also, if students cannot pronounce the words, they will find it difficult or impossible to incorporate them into their reading and writing vocabularies. Therefore, we recommend that teachers remind students to use strategies to "decode" unknown words. Step-by-step directions for how to use context or structural analysis are described on the Omaha Public Schools' Reading Services Center site in the Teachers' Corner: Secondary Content Teacher Reading Strategies (n.d.).

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE: TEACHING DEVICES AND ROUTINES

Using Graphic Organizers. Effective teachers begin each class with some type of technique that establishes a clear purpose for the lesson. In this regard, graphic organizers have captured the interest of many educators because the organizers do such a good job of illustrating the relationships among key concepts. In addition to establishing a framework at the beginning of a lesson or unit, they provide a structure for note taking and, at the end of a unit, a study tool.

Thinking Aloud. In order to make instruction transparent, teachers need to be explicit. Vulnerable learners, especially, require that the rules of the academic game be very clearly spelled out. The professional literature repeatedly mentions modeling as a key component of good instruction. How can teachers model so that students "get it"?

Modeling works best when it includes thinking out loud. The teacher demonstrates for students how he or she approaches a particular task. Teachers can use overhead transparencies, PowerPoint slides, Smart Boards, or chalkboards as they talk about their thought processes; students follow along by listening and watching. For special needs students, one example is likely to be insufficient. Teachers may need to think out loud through several examples before asking students to practice on their own or in small groups. Richard Vacca and Jo Anne Vacca (2002) have developed a think-aloud protocol (Eureka! n.d.) that can help teachers to model the process.

Other Techniques. Teaching routines that facilitate comprehension and improve writing skills can be found on many different websites. One example is ReadingQuest (ReadingQuest.org, 2006), which is designed to support the work of social studies teachers but could easily be used by other content-area teachers as well. The Literacy Matters site (n.d.) is another excellent resource. It provides basic information about well-documented techniques as well as links to other sites with teaching strategies and materials.

WORKING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE: TEACHING LEARNING STRATEGIES

There is a growing evidence base to support the effectiveness of using learning strategies with adolescents, particularly for special needs students in regular education settings.

- The Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas has been actively involved in the area of learning strategies for mildly disabled adolescents for at least twenty years. Besides coming up with a series of multistep strategies, each with a mnemonic to facilitate retention, Jean Schumaker, Don Deshler, and their colleagues have collected sufficient student achievement data in regular and special education classroom settings to validate their strategic instructional model (SIM). While SIM strategies are designed to be taught to small groups of students by intervention specialists in a series of short, intensive lessons across several weeks, content-area teachers can reinforce the use of these strategies through a cue-do-review routine. The teacher cues students by explaining why and how a strategy is to be employed. Students then get an opportunity to "do" when they practice applying this technique, at first with a great deal of teacher support and feedback and eventually on their own. Finally, the teacher reviews what it is that has been learned using this technique and how the technique can be applied in other situations.

- Another good source of learning strategies is the Learning Toolbox. Esther Minskoff, David Allsopp, Jerry Minskoff, Margaret Kyger, and their colleagues at James Madison University have developed a user-friendly website that provides a learning strategies assessment as well as a variety of specific strategies aimed at promoting active learning. Design features of the website (limited text, use of graphics, and a predictable structure) make it accessible not only for teachers but also for students with learning disabilities or attention deficits.

- While there has been increasing emphasis on higher-order thinking at the secondary level, students still need to learn and retain a great deal of factual information if they hope to earn good grades. Mastropieri and Scruggs (1998) outline specific mnemonic strategies that have a proven track record for improving recall; these strategies are useful for those aspects of a lesson or unit that require memorization (terminology, lists, and specific facts that include numbers).

- Bos and Vaughn (2002), in *Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning and Behavior Problems*, identify two highly effective examples of cognitive strategy instruction (CSI) which involve multiple components and have a positive impact on reading comprehension. Reciprocal teaching and collaborative strategic reading highlight strategies that proficient readers use to gain meaning. Both work well with a wide range of learners, subject areas, and reading materials.

- Palincsar and Brown (1984) developed reciprocal teaching, a methodology that includes four "proficient reader" strategies (predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing) in small-group settings. The teacher models each strategy separately before expecting students to use all four. Once students demonstrate an understanding of the strategies, the "teacher" role rotates among members of the small group, and others assume responsibility for each of the strategies as they work through a novel, a nonfiction title, or a text chapter.

- Klingner and Vaughn (1998) incorporated cooperative learning principles and modified the four strategies used in reciprocal teaching to address the needs of special learners in their multicomponent-

strategy approach. Collaborative strategic reading consists of the following strategies: preview (before reading the entire selection), click and clunk (while reading, look for words that are difficult to understand), get the gist (ask questions and paraphrase as you read), and wrap up (after reading, ask "big-picture" questions and review to find the answers).

- Evidence on the effectiveness of learning strategies is not limited to mildly handicapped adolescents. Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, and Agran (2004) reported on successful interventions with developmentally handicapped middle school students. In their study, twenty-two middle and junior high students with mental retardation received intervention on self-determination skills (problem solving and study planning) within the context of language arts, science, and social studies. These students not only learned the strategies but also were able to meet standards-based objectives related to the content areas.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

In descriptions of how to teach learning strategies, time is always set aside for guided and independent practice. Practice is the variable that consistently correlates with student achievement in studies of disabled populations. For vulnerable learners, the amount of practice needed is considerable.

To illustrate this point, let's look specifically at the strategic instructional model developed at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. SIM has some form of practice built into four of the eight steps in an instructional sequence. SIM strategies generally require a class period daily dedicated to strategy instruction across several weeks, with refresher sessions periodically after the intensive phase.

But subject-area teachers cannot devote that kind of time solely to learning strategies. The only way to ensure that students get the practice that they need is to identify the most critical strategies based on student needs, to ask intervention specialists or other school personnel to collaborate in instructional delivery, and to integrate strategy practice in a systematic manner across units of study.

Teachers who are intentional about learning strategies create sturdy scaffolds for their students. Scaffolding gives clear directions, establishes a purpose, keeps learners on track, demonstrates or articulates expected outcomes, ensures that there is a comfortable rhythm in the classroom, and provides informative feedback (McKenzie, 1999). Without good scaffolding, practice can be inefficient, or, even worse, counterproductive.

Practice and Reading Fluency. Let's apply the notion of intentional practice to the topic of reading fluency. "Difficulties with reading fluency are nearly universal among individuals with learning disabilities in reading" (Spear-Swerling, 2006, p. 1). Fluent reading (Bryant, Englehard, & Reetz, n.d.) is characterized by automatic, accurate word recognition; when reading aloud, fluent readers use appropriate intonation, expression, and phrasing. Without sufficient fluency, comprehension suffers. The types of interventions that have yielded success include repeated reading (oral reading of a short passage until a pre-established fluency criterion is reached), paired reading (oral reading with a partner), tape-assisted reading (oral reading with an audiotaped model), and chunking (oral reading using teacher-marked text that delineates phrase boundaries).

While intervention or reading specialists may need to set up intensive instruction, there are some valuable and valid ways that content-area teachers can support fluency in their classrooms. English teachers in particular can look for places in the curriculum where it is natural to integrate skilled oral reading. Poetry and plays are meant to be read aloud. Using one of the four evidence-based techniques (repeated reading, paired reading, tape-assisted reading, or chunking), struggling readers would have the opportunity to polish their basic reading skills while satisfying course requirements if teachers set aside time for poetry readings or reader's theater (Carrick, 2001). Reader's theater allows students to take on character roles, rehearse their parts, and perform in front of the class. It does not require elaborate costumes, makeup, or staging.

CAPITALIZING ON THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF LEARNING

The work of Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, has had a significant impact on how we conceptualize teaching and learning. A central notion within his theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development.

Peer-Assisted Learning. Because learning is social, opportunities for practice can be embedded in routines that encourage students to learn with and from one another. Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is an umbrella term for a host of techniques (peer tutoring, peer modeling, peer education/counseling, and peer assessment) that are based on the assumption that individuals learn by helping others to learn. Keith Topping and Stewart Ehly (1998) have edited a text that describes PAL in its various forms and presents theory as well as evidence to support its efficacy. The Vanderbilt Kennedy

Center maintains a website on PAL for reading and mathematics that provides basic information, reference lists, and descriptions and demonstration videos of materials that are available for purchase. Barbara M. Fulk and Kathy King (2001) describe classwide peer tutoring in an article published in *Teaching Exceptional Children*. In addition to peer tutoring, the professional literature also contains examples of cross-age tutoring, with adolescent remedial readers providing reading tutoring to elementary-age youngsters, which resulted in improved fluency and comprehension for tutors and tutees (Fisher, 2001; Paterson & Elliott, 2006).

Collaborative Learning. Collaborative learning techniques take full advantage of the social aspects of learning. Some techniques get students to be active by requiring them to work in pairs. With think-pair-share (Lyman, 1981), students think about a teacher question or prompt, discuss their answers or responses with a partner, and then share their thinking with the rest of the class.

Most collaborative learning techniques involve small heterogeneous groups of four to six students rather than pairs. A workshop with brief explanations and video clip examples of cooperative learning in action is available online (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004). One point that is emphasized repeatedly in the professional literature is that all students need to be both active and accountable if true collaboration is to take place. Therefore, it is common practice for teachers to define specific roles that members will play during group meetings and to require individual as well as group assignments.

Literature Circles. Literature circles are used widely in elementary and middle school classrooms as collaborative structures that encourage youngsters of varying abilities to interact with text and with one another. Katherine L. Schlick Noe, professor and director of the College of Education, Seattle University, developed the *Literature Circles Resource Center* website for teachers in elementary and middle schools. The purpose of the site is to provide in-depth information and resources on literature circles. *Literature Circles: During Reading Strategy* (All America Reads, 2003) is another good "how-to" resource on literature circles. While this technique is used largely in elementary and middle school settings, there is reason to believe that it can be equally successful in high school English classrooms (Adams, 2001).

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION: INVITING ALL STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

Because of the growing diversity among students in today's classrooms, differentiation has become a necessity. You cannot discuss this topic without paying tribute to the work of Carol Tomlinson (1999, 2001). Tomlinson provides a rationale for tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. She suggests ways to provide the right level of challenge for students above, below, and at expected levels of performance.

Accommodation/Adaptation. There are going to be those times when the best routines and strategy instruction simply don't work with some of your more challenging students. In these situations, you have to come up with individualized *accommodations* or *adaptations.* While these terms are often used interchangeably, Lenz and Deshler (2004) point out subtle differences between them. Whereas accommodation involves changes that do not substantially change the content or the difficulty level of a task (e.g., allowing a student to use a computer instead of paper and pencil), adaptation may require more substantial modifications (e.g., reducing the number of test items or using lower-level reading materials).

Mark Jewell (2003) developed a resource guide for the state of Washington entitled *Adaptations Are Essential: Middle Years Reading.* In it, he outlines the C-A-R-E-S approach to adaptation (*c*hange the learning environment, *a*lter the instructional materials/activities, *r*evise teaching strategies, *e*xchange task requirements that define success, and *s*ubstitute an alternate task that matches the student's level of performance). After identifying student needs, teachers decide what level of intervention is required to achieve successful outcomes. The guide, which is available as a PDF, has many practical suggestions.

Universal Design. One very intriguing way to think about differentiation is to consider the concept of universal design (CAST, 2002-2006). This notion has its origins in architecture. Ron Mace at North Carolina State University was looking for a way to build physical structures that accommodated as many types of people as possible, including those with disabilities, in order to eliminate the need for modifications at a later point for particular populations. Universal design for learning is an extension of the architectural initiative. After working with teachers and their students, universal designers realized that their concept could be applied to curriculum materials. Experimenting with multimedia tools, they created electronic books that were flexible and contained features that made these CD-ROM texts usable by a wide range of learners. Moving beyond curriculum materials, universal design advocates have now established three basic instructional principles: (1) Give students multiple ways to acquire

information, (2) provide students with a number of ways to show what they know, and (3) come up with a number of ways to engage, challenge, and motivate students. The section of the CAST site, "Teaching Every Student," provides model lessons that operationalize these principles.

Multimedia: Books and More. Given the wide range of reading levels and learning styles in the typical secondary classrooms, the "one-text-fits-all" approach is no longer viable. If we want students to read, we need to have books available at their independent reading levels. *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time, Grades 4-12* (Lesesne, 2003) is an excellent resource; the book includes sections entitled "Knowing the Kids," "Knowing the Books," and "Making the Match." In addition, book lists and other types of resources are provided in appendices.

Walker and Bean (2005) found that the three teachers they observed used multiple texts as a way to provide students with access to information, to pique their interest, and to give them a variety of writing models. Behrman (2003) conducted a naturalistic study on adolescents enrolled in a six-week, summer biology course in which students were allowed to select their own texts to complete problem-based learning assignments. Students tended to use the Internet rather than the class library. O'Brien (2001), after four years of working with two teacher colleagues on a project-based curriculum and observing high school students as they produced multimedia projects, challenged the notion of "at-riskness" and encouraged educators to view students with this label through a different lens. The students that he worked with, while uncomfortable with traditional literacies, were "capable and literate if we view them from the perspective of multiliteracies" (p. 1). In fact, while it was hard for the students to deal with the reading and writing demands of their projects, "they overcame some of the struggles when print served as one media text among many" (p. 4).

The more comfortable teachers become with technology in the classroom, the easier it will be to find alternative texts. The Alliance for Technology Access (n.d.), in partnership with the Regional Technology in Education Consortium at WestEd, has built the website *Technology Tips for Differentiated Instruction*, which includes resources that either are already available in schools or are free to educators. At least two popular e-readers (applications used to view e-books that may have a number of enhancements including music, external links, simulations, sound effects, search features, and highlighting capabilities) can be downloaded at no cost (see Assistive Technology Training Online Project, Center for Assistive Technology, 2005) and will read any text file or e-book. For a more thorough discussion of electronic books, refer to a 1999 *Reading Online* article by Anderson-Inman and Horney. While it is still relatively difficult to find electronic books with suitable enhancements for adolescent struggling readers, online audiobooks (see Denise Johnson's 2003 article, "Audiobook Ear-resistible"), audiobook reviews, and audiobook suppliers are easily accessible.

Differentiated Assessment. Differentiated instruction leads naturally to differentiated assessment. Giving students a menu of assessment options is one way to allow learners to show what they know. Portfolios, performance tasks graded with rubrics, and other alternatives to paper-and-pencil tests allow special needs youngsters to use their strengths.

HOW DO WE PUT THIS ALL TOGETHER? SMARTER PLANNING

Lenz and Deshler (2004) describe a SMARTER approach to planning that encourages teachers to incorporate evidence-based routines and strategies into their repertoires:

Shape the critical questions.
Map the critical content.
Analyze for learning difficulties.
Reach enhancement decisions.
Teach strategically.
Evaluate mastery.
Revisit outcomes.

Perhaps the most important part of this planning routine is to select the essential content. The Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas has come up with the metaphor of a "curriculum pie" (Lenz, 2003) to help teachers make decisions about essential material.

At the center of the pie is the content that we expect all students to learn. In order to make this expectation realistic, teachers will select approximately 10 percent of the course that is absolutely critical and place it in the inner ring. In the second band, we put what we expect most students to get out of the course. This should amount to about 30 percent of the content introduced across the year. In the outer ring, which accounts for 60 percent of the curriculum, we assign material that only some students will master. Each unit of instruction is a slice of the curriculum pie with all three rings represented. By taking this approach, we ensure that we cover the essentials but also provide challenges for students who can go beyond the basics. We can't expect that everything we teach is going to be mastered by 100 percent of our students. Once we establish priorities, we can figure out how to introduce, reinforce, and provide sufficient practice to get across the most important ideas and skills.

APPLYING SMARTER PLANNING TO STANDARDS-BASED LESSONS

In order to illustrate how SMARTER planning helps to make instruction more accessible for special needs students, let's look at a ReadWriteThink lesson entitled "Reader Response in Hypertext: Making Personal Connections to Literature" (Schulze, n.d.) and a SMARTER routine for the lesson.

Patricia Schulze, the author of this six-lesson sequence, aims to enhance high school students' appreciation of good literature by asking them to read a novel and identify particular quotations that focus on setting, character, metaphor, and theme; to write a series of short papers; and to design websites that include the quotations and papers. This ambitious lesson sequence could be daunting for special needs adolescents. Can strategy instruction embedded in the lessons, combined with a few relatively painless modifications borrowed from clever teachers who know how to differentiate without driving themselves crazy, make it possible for even the most challenged learner to find some level of success?

First let's consider the choice of text. The author provides a list of possible novels that have memorable settings; the only problem is that most of these titles would be beyond adolescents who read comfortably at a fourth or fifth grade level. It is not at all unusual for special needs adolescents to be two or more years behind their typically developing peers in reading. Teachers have four options: (1) they can give students an alternative text at a lower-readability level, (2) they can use an adapted or film version of the required novel if one or both are available, (3) they can locate an audiotaped version, or (4) they can make the assumption that participation in a small group will provide sufficient scaffolding to ensure success for even a struggling reader.

Schulze suggests that teachers have their students write down their favorite quotations on worksheets or in journals. For students who might take an excessively long time to copy out of a book, consider using Post-it notes to mark quotations in lieu of written responses. Why not color-code quotations by using four different colors of Post-it notes, one for each of the required categories (character, setting, metaphor, and theme)? Then, during class, one of the more proficient scribes in the group could copy down the identified quotations onto a recording sheet.

After reading and responding to the novel, high school students are expected to complete four writing assignments (a narrative, a character sketch, a poem, and a persuasive essay). For each, Schulze has provided teachers with guiding questions or activities to get the creative juices flowing. An accommodation that we would suggest for special needs youngsters, particularly for those with short attention spans or auditory processing deficits, is to write down these prompts on a sheet of paper so that an individual who needs to do so can follow along and even check off each prompt as it is presented. Procedural facilitators (prompts, outlines, cues, checklists, etc.), according to Baker, Gersten, and Scanlon (2002), help all students act like expert learners.

While the lesson sequence as written includes an opportunity for feedback after all four papers have been completed, we would argue, particularly for our target population of special needs students, that either peer conferencing or an instructional conversation with the classroom teacher or intervention specialist is necessary after each paper. Students meet in small groups during the last class in the lesson sequence to read and respond to one another's work; this will only work for special needs adolescents if they have received informative feedback along the way and, as a result, have products that are worth sharing. Otherwise, going public with their papers could be a recipe for disaster.

Below is a list of Ohio Resource Center (ORC) lessons with SMARTER plans for each of the lessons. We took what were already excellent lessons and "deconstructed" them using the SMARTER planning procedure. What we added were teaching routines or student learning strategies that we predict will get students over bumps in the road caused by weak research, reading, or writing skills. These "fortified" lessons will be available on the AdLIT section of the ORC website.

ORC lesson: "Press Conference for Bud, Not Buddy"
SMARTER plan: SMARTER Plan for "Press Conference for Bud, Not Buddy"

ORC lesson: "Persuasive Writing: Environmental Issues"
SMARTER plan: SMARTER Plan for "Persuasive Writing: Environmental Issues"

ORC lesson: "Choosing, Chatting, and Collecting: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy"
SMARTER plan: SMARTER Plan for "Choosing, Chatting, and Collecting: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy

ORC lesson: "Understanding Fluency Through Oral Interpretation"
SMARTER plan: SMARTER Plan for "Understanding Fluency Through Oral Interpretation"

ORC lesson: "Authentic Persuasive Writing to Promote Summer Reading"

SMARTER plan: SMARTER Plan for "Authentic Persuasive Writing to Promote Summer Reading"

NOW THAT WE HAVE IT ALL PLANNED OUT, HOW DO WE GET STUDENT "BUY-IN"?

John Guthrie (2001), in his synopsis of a chapter from the *Handbook of Reading Research*, identified context variables that increase the likelihood that students will be engaged, motivated readers. In classrooms where teachers and students together establish learning (process) rather than performance (product) goals and those goals align with standards that are conceptual in nature, student autonomy will increase. "Concept-based instruction gives teachers an opportunity to enable students to choose subtopics, select specific materials for learning, and use strategies that the students believe are effective for them. These forms of autonomy are motivating" (p. 5). There is a body of research to support the notion that effective teachers give students choices whenever possible. With choice come a sense of empowerment and a desire to be an active learner.

Students also need interesting texts and opportunities to carry on extended conversations with peers about these texts, according to Guthrie. Direct strategy instruction helps students to navigate texts efficiently and to write effectively; this type of instruction is most likely to be beneficial when it is introduced and reinforced across content areas. While it is common practice to infuse reading and writing instruction in social studies and language arts, science and mathematics teachers should also be encouraged to do so. Topics in mathematics and science can be enhanced through the use of trade books. One very useful resource for titles in science and mathematics is *Search for literature: Literature for science and mathematics* (n.d.), a searchable database maintained by the California Department of Education.

Adolescents talk a great deal about whether or not teachers care about them. "The involved teacher knows about the students' personal knowledge and interests, cares about each student's learning, and holds realistic, positive goals for students' effort and learning" (Guthrie, 2001, p. 8). Middle and high school students who are ambivalent about working for intrinsic reasons are likely to exert effort for "involved" teachers. Grading practices also play a role in whether or not students "buy in" to what a teacher is "selling." Criterion-referenced evaluation, with some credit given for progress and effort, is likely to have a positive impact on persistence.

In an ethnographic study of low-achieving, urban high school students, Lee (1999), assisted by student researchers, interviewed 40 students in grades 9-12 with dismal academic records. A number of important themes emerged. The students interviewed, who all had GPAs of less than 2.0 and poor attendance records, talked about the need for more culturally relevant material, more interesting class discussions related to real-world issues, more group work, and more enthusiastic teachers. They also wanted to play a larger role in teacher evaluation and choice of class topics.

Motivating adolescents who have had a history of school failure is particularly challenging. Learned helplessness and negative attributions are common by-products of learning disabilities. LD adolescents who exhibit learned helplessness are dependent, passive, and unwilling to take risks. Without some belief in one's ability to overcome obstacles, individuals are unlikely to persist long enough to succeed at academic tasks. It is possible to train someone to attribute success to hard work and effective strategies and failure to lack of effort or ineffective strategies. Teachers can make a difference by giving students opportunities to succeed and then making sure that they see the relationship between actions and outcomes. With individualized coaching and success experiences, even the most fragile adolescents can turn it around and begin to take charge of their own learning.

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