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What All Reading Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do

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What All Reading Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do

by Pledger Fedora



Abstract

When students experience reading difficulties—or even before they do—teachers can use specialized knowledge to help them achieve success. This overview of the International Dyslexia Association’s Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading describes those reading and literacy standards and provides resources for teacher education and professional development.

Key words: *reading, emerging literacy, teacher education, certification, dyslexia*

Reading difficulties are the most common cause of academic failure, and, unfortunately, the United States has a persistent and long-standing problem with reading achievement. Because research points to gaps in the teacher knowledge base in this area, improvement may be found in teacher education and professional development.

Troubling Findings

The first few years of school are critical for learning to read (Adams, 1990), and the ability to read and comprehend text provides the foundation for success in school. Longitudinal studies have indicated that more than 17% of students will experience reading problems in the first three years of school (National Reading Panel, 2000). Because reading difficulties fall on a spectrum of severity, not all students struggling with learning to read will qualify for special education services and will therefore be the

responsibility of the regular education teacher.

Since 1992, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data has demonstrated that effecting significant improvement in reading achievement eludes educators. Indeed, the most recent NAEP (2011) data indicated that 33% of 4th grade students and approximately 26% of 8th grade students read below the basic level.

As a result of these findings, the education and professional development of teachers responsible for preventing and remediating reading difficulties has become a growing concern among teacher educators and researchers (Moats & Foorman, 2003). Teacher knowledge of basic language constructs has been the focus of several investigations. Piasta, Connor, Fishman, and Morrison (2009), in a study of teacher knowledge, explicit decoding, and student word-reading gains, found that students who spent more time receiving explicit instruction with more knowledgeable teachers had stronger word-reading gains than students with less knowledgeable teachers. They concluded that specialized knowledge is a critical factor in teacher quality.

Washburn, Joshi, and Cantrell (2011) examined elementary school preservice teachers’ knowledge of basic language constructs and concluded that preservice teachers likely lack the knowledge necessary to teach students struggling with learning to read. According to Moats (2009), teachers often feel unprepared to address the instructional needs of their students, especially



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students in need of explicit instruction, and have a limited understanding of how students learn to read or why students experience difficulty with reading.

For students experiencing difficulty learning to read, early and intensive intervention is especially important for improving student outcomes (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007). Research has shown that high-quality instruction in the early grades is the best preventative for reading failure (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); therefore early assessments are critical. Another gap in the teacher knowledge base can be found in the use and interpretation of assessments. Thorough training through coursework or professional development in the use and interpretation of assessment results will help teachers recognize which students are struggling with early reading. Because preservice teachers do not always receive thorough training in assessment instruments (Begeny & Martens, 2006), it is important for teacher education programs to align the content of instruction with current research. If early identification and early intervention are to be maximally effective, teacher education programs need to provide preservice teachers with the content knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of students.

To address these concerns, a number of organizations have provided reports detailing best practices in reading instruction designed to prevent reading failure. Unfortunately, the National Council on Teacher Quality (Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006) found that few schools of education train preservice teachers in the basic knowledge necessary to teach reading. According to Cunningham, Zibulsky, and Callahan (2009), it takes more than being a skilled reader to be a skilled reading teacher. Many of the concepts that preservice teachers need to know to teach reading effectively must be acquired through study and coursework or professional development.

Supporting preservice teachers in acquiring the requisite knowledge needed to support reading development begins with the alignment of curriculum with the science of reading. To guide the preparation, certification, and professional development of those who teach reading and related literacy skills, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) developed a comprehensive document outlining the *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* (Moats et al., 2010). IDA provided these standards because research has shown that if teachers are better prepared, the impact of reading difficulties will be reduced (Moats et al., 2010).

What's in the Knowledge and Practice Standards?

Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading (Moats et al., 2010) specifies what individuals responsible for teaching reading should know and be able to do so that reading difficulties may be prevented or remediated. The standards are divided into two sections, with the first section detailing what all teachers of reading should know and be able to do. The second section provides guidelines relating to the supervised practice of teachers of students identified with reading disabilities or dyslexia.

The designation of Level 1 or Level 2 follows many of the standards. Level 1 indicates a standard that should be met by novice teachers, whereas Level 2 standards are those that should be met by specialists. This paper focuses on Section I of the standards, which covers six broad areas of study. Each area is described here along with Level 1 examples of specific content knowledge needed. Additional resources are provided for those seeking further information on specific topics.

Table 1. Foundation Concepts about Oral and Written Learning Resources.**Ideal Curriculum**

www.idealcurriculum.com/oral-language-development.html

This website provides information on specific oral language instruction strategies.

Lyon, G. R. (1998). Why reading is not a natural process. *Educational Leadership*, 55(6), 14–18. Retrieved from www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar98/vol55/num06/Why-Reading-Is-Not-a-Natural-Process.aspx

This article discusses phoneme awareness and phonics.

Foundations for Learning to Read: Oral Language, Grades 4–8

From *A Research-Based Framework for Houghton Mifflin Reading Grades K–8*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

www.eduplace.com/marketing/nc/pdf/fw_p42-43.pdf

This brief paper discusses reading performance in grades 4 and beyond.

Table 2. Linguistics/History Resources.

King, D. H. (2000). *English isn't crazy: The elements of our language and how to teach them*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

This easy-to-understand book traces the history of the English language from its origins, including the influence of other languages, to the complex vocabulary in use today. Exercises and helpful ideas give teachers practical methods for expanding classroom discussions.

Moats, L. (2010). *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

This text aligns with findings of current scientific research on reading and helps teachers understand the structure of written and spoken English, how children learn to read, and how to apply this knowledge when providing explicit literacy instruction. Teaching activities help teachers connect what they learn with classroom instruction.

Words in English

www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words04

This is a great resource for those who want to learn more about the English language—its history as a language, the origins of its words, and its current modern characteristics.

The Cognatarium

www.cognatarium.com/cognatarium

Search for a word within the lexicon and find the morphemes that make up the subject word.

Henry, M. (2010, February 28). *Morphemes: Structural clues for word meaning*. Retrieved from vocablog-plc.blogspot.com/2010/02/morphemes-structural-clues-for-word.html

This blog post contributed by Marcia Henry presents a framework for teaching morphemes.

Funbrain®

www.funbrain.com/roots/index.html

This website has fun activities for younger students to practice skills. Students will enjoy practicing with “Rooting Out Words” and reading-related games.

1. Foundation Concepts about Oral and Written Learning

Research has established the abilities that are important in learning to read and write. Teachers' knowledge of this research provides the foundation for the competencies and skills outlined in *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading*. Among other things, teachers need to know appropriate goals for students at different stages of reading and writing development as well as understand how language and reading are related and why learning to read is not natural. They need to know how the process changes over time and how good readers differ from poor readers. For example, poor readers rely heavily on context (Cunningham, 2013) to read an unfamiliar word, whereas good readers recognize most words automatically without using context (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). For resources, see Table 1.

2. Knowledge of the Structure of Language

Knowledge of the structure of language, including phonology (speech sound system), orthography (spelling system), morphology, semantics, syntax, and discourse organization, is necessary to correctly interpret assessments. Teachers who are not knowledgeable in these areas may confuse students by asking them to sound out words that are not phonetically regular (e.g., *does*).

In the area of phonology, teachers need to be able to identify, pronounce, classify, and compare the consonant and vowel phonemes of English. For example, teachers need to be able to identify similar or contrasting features among phonemes (e.g., *p* and *b*). They need to understand the historical influences on English orthography, especially Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and Greek, in order to recognize historical influences on spelling variations. For example, the phoneme /f/ is spelled with the letter *f* in words derived from Anglo-Saxon (e.g., *fox*),

Table 3. Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) Resources.

while words derived from Greek are spelled with **ph** (e.g., *phone*). This can be confusing to a student who has been taught that the phoneme /f/ is represented by the letter **f**.

Teachers also need to identify, explain, and categorize six syllable types in order to sort, pronounce, and combine regular written syllables and apply the most productive syllable division principles. They need to be able to categorize common morphemes in English and understand semantic organization in order to recognize the most common roots and affixes, and analyze words at the morpheme level. For resources, see Table 2.

3. Knowledge of Dyslexia and Other Learning Disorders

Awareness of the characteristics of dyslexia and other learning disabilities will help teachers understand how students differ from one another and plan appropriate instruction to match the students' specific needs. The ability to recognize subtypes of poor readers (e.g., phonological deficit) and match students with methodologies and practices that have been shown to work best with different subgroups of poor readers will foster improved student outcomes. For resources, see Table 3.

4. Interpretation and Administration of Assessments for Planning Instruction

Administering and interpreting assessments is important because teachers need to be able to identify students who are struggling early and provide intervention. Assessments also provide clear information for planning targeted instruction focusing on the student's areas of weakness. A teacher should be able to explain why a student is or is not at risk based on the student's performance on reading screening assessments and should be able to chart progress monitoring data to determine whether or not a student is making progress. For resources, see Table 4.

International Dyslexia Association

www.interdys.org

This informative website for individuals with dyslexia, their families, and professionals in the field focuses on four areas: Advocacy, Information and Referral Services, Parent Support and Outreach, and Standards and Practices for Service Providers.

National Center for Learning Disabilities

www.nclld.org

Visit this website for information on specific learning disabilities.

LD Online

www.ldonline.org

This website provides information on learning disabilities and ADHD.

Table 4. Assessment Resources.

Mather, N., & Wendling, B. (2012). *Essentials of dyslexia assessment and intervention*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

This resource provides step-by-step information on accurately identifying, assessing, and using evidence-based interventions with individuals with dyslexia.

DIBELS Data System

<https://dibels.uoregon.edu>

This excellent resource provides free reading assessments for progress monitoring.

Intervention Central

www.interventioncentral.org

A variety of assessment resources are available at this website.

Table 5. Phonology Resources.

What is Phonology?

www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatsPhonology.htm

This website provides information on phonology, phonetics, and related topics.

Phonology

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2014). *An introduction to language* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.

Chapter 6, "Phonology: The Sound Patterns of Language," provides an excellent overview of phonology, including speech sounds, distinctive features of phonemes, the rules of phonology, syllable structure, word stress, intonation, and phonological analysis.

5. Structured Language Teaching

For each of six subtopics associated with language teaching, Level 1 examples of content knowledge and how this knowledge might be used are provided.

Table 6. Phonics and Word Recognition Resources.

Gillingham, A., & Stillman, B. W. (1997). *The Gillingham manual: Remedial training for students with specific disability in reading, spelling, and penmanship* (8th ed.). Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.

Retrieved from eps.schoolspecialty.com/other/ogapproach/#manual
This phonics-based guide is used to instruct individuals with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It covers reading and spelling, dictionary use, vowels, consonants, digraphs, diphthongs, word structure, and handwriting using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic associations. The appendix includes evaluation tools and lesson plans, as well as a glossary.

bumpybooks™

www.bumpybooks.com/sounditout.php

This website provides audio clips demonstrating the correct pronunciation of single consonant and vowel sounds.

There's an App for that!

Phonics Genius has 6,000+ words grouped by phonics sounds.

Table 7. Fluency Resources.**Rapid Recognition Chart Generator**

neuhaus.org/consumables

This is a great resource for customizing word lists for students to practice reading for fluency.

Word Searcher

www.neilramsdn.co.uk/spelling/searcher/index.html

This tool generates lists of words based on the pattern entered.

There's an App for that!

Fluency Timer is an adjustable timer that automatically records students' fluency readings for playback and sharing.

a. Phonology

Phonological awareness, print concepts, and letter-sound knowledge are basic building blocks of literacy. Knowledgeable teachers providing systematic instruction in these skills can reduce the incidence of reading problems. In the area of phonology, knowledge of the progression of phonological skill development will aid in selecting and implementing activities

that match a student's developmental level of phonological skill. For resources, see Table 5.

b. Phonics and Word Recognition

Phonics and word recognition skills are critical to developing accurate decoding abilities, which are essential for reading comprehension. To plan lessons with a cumulative progression of word recognition skills that build on each other, teachers need to be able to order phonics concepts from simple to complex. To effectively teach word recognition, they need to understand the principles of explicit teaching. The ability to provide explicit, systematic, appropriately sequenced instruction in phonics is necessary for meeting the needs of struggling readers. For resources, see Table 6.

c. Fluent, Automatic Reading of Text

Fluency is the automaticity of underlying subskills of reading that allows the reader to read a text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression and comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). This is an important skill that is frequently overlooked by teachers, especially if the student is an accurate decoder. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand the role of fluency in word recognition, oral reading, silent reading, comprehension of written discourse, and motivation to read in order to assess students' fluency rate and determine reasonable expectations for reading fluency at various stages of reading development. The ability to interpret fluency measures will help teachers place students in appropriate texts for instruction and provide interventions for students with poor reading fluency. For resources, see Table 7.

d. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a key factor in reading comprehension. Understanding the role of vocabulary development and vocabulary knowledge in comprehension will assist teachers when teaching word meanings directly using a

Table 8. Vocabulary Resources.

variety of methods. Teachers should know the characteristics of direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction and be able to select materials that will expand students' vocabulary. For resources, see Table 8.

e. Text Comprehension

Comprehension is the goal of reading instruction. Teachers need to be familiar with appropriate teaching strategies that promote reflective reading in order to be able to state the purpose for reading, provide background knowledge, and explore related vocabulary. Posing questions during text reading will foster attention to detail, inference making, and mental model construction. For resources, see Table 9.

f. Handwriting, Spelling, and Written Expression

Effective instruction and intervention in written expression depend on recognizing a student's specific weaknesses in the different component areas of writing (e.g., handwriting, mechanics, sentence structure) and on teachers' abilities to provide systematic, explicit instruction in each area. Teachers need to know research-based principles for teaching letter naming and letter formation, both manuscript and cursive, in order to use multisensory techniques to teach letter naming and letter formation. Knowledge of techniques for teaching handwriting fluency will help teachers implement strategies to build fluency in letter formation, copying, and writing. The ability to identify students' levels of spelling development and orthographic knowledge will help teachers select materials that address students' skill levels. Knowledge of the major components and processes of written expression and how they interact will facilitate teachers' integration of basic skill instruction with composition writing lessons. Teachers need to know grade and developmental

Fifer, N., & Flowers, N. (1998). *Vocabulary from classical roots, Books A–D*. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service. Retrieved from eps.schoolspecialty.com/products/details.cfm?seriesonly=2252M
This resource provides strategic vocabulary instruction through Greek and Latin roots and helps unlock the meanings of thousands of words.

Vocabulogic

vocablog-plc.blogspot.com

This website is packed with information on vocabulary and morphology.

Quizlet

quizlet.com

This website provides flash cards to study Latin roots and a variety of resources to help learn roots and affixes.

Anki

ankisrs.net

This program allows students to create electronic flash cards.

There's an App for that!



Montessori Crosswords helps kids develop literacy skills by dragging and dropping letters into a crossword grid to form words that correspond to the given pictures.



Quizlet can be used to create flash cards for studying on the go.

Table 9. Text Comprehension Resources.

Pictures for Retelling Stories

neuhaus.org/pictures-for-retelling-colors-and-shapes-1

This free resource provides materials that can be used to help develop metacognitive skills.

Scaffold Cards for Independent Reading

neuhaus.org/consumables

These cards are useful for students who have developed good metacognitive thinking skills for reading. Question generation guided by the cards and careful teacher modeling can aid independent reading in both narrative and expository text.

There's an App for that!



Aesop's Quest, based on *Aesop's Fables*, is a learning game where the student must remember elements of a story to complete a level.

Table 10. Handwriting, Spelling, and Written Expression Resources.

Moats, L. C. (2005/06). How spelling supports reading: And why it is more regular and predictable than you may think. *American Educator*, 29(4), 12–22, 42. Retrieved from www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/winter0506/Moats.pdf

An article worth reading! It provides an easy-to-read explanation of the English spelling system and why it is more regular and predictable than many people think.

Real Spelling

www.realspelling.fr/Welcome_to_Real_Spelling/Choose-New.html
Teachers working with students with dyslexia will find Melvyn Ramsden's Real Spelling website worth a visit.

WordWorks

www.wordworkskingston.com/WordWorks/Home.html
This website is rich with practical ideas and information.

Word Building and Spelling

www.neilramsden.co.uk/spelling/index.html
Developed by Neil Ramsden, this website is an excellent resource for generating word lists.

Handwriting

neuhaus.org/consumables

Find two handwriting resources:

- Stroke descriptions that aid in the formation of manuscript letters
- Stroke descriptions that aid in the formation of cursive letters

There's an App for that!



Alpha Writer is a learning app that helps teach kids letter sounds and how to form words by combining different letter sounds.

expectations for students' writing in mechanics and conventions of writing, composition, revision, and editing processes to plan activities to teach these components of writing and analyze students' writing to determine specific instructional needs. For resources, see Table 10.

6. Ethical Standards for the Profession

A section on ethical standards for the profession is included to safeguard and promote the well-being of individuals with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. This section covers a range of topics including acting in the best interest of individuals with dyslexia, respecting confidentiality of students, and reporting assessments and

treatment results accurately, honestly, and truthfully.

Closing Thoughts

Specialized knowledge is necessary to teach students struggling with learning to read. According to Moats (2012), teacher preparation is the key to improving reading outcomes. To graduate well-prepared teachers who are capable of delivering high-quality reading instruction, teacher education programs need to provide preservice teachers with the content knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of all students. Well-prepared, knowledgeable teachers will be better able to reduce the impact of reading difficulties by providing systematic, explicit instruction and support for all of their students, including those struggling with language-based learning difficulties. ■

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