

REL Mid-Atlantic Educator Effectiveness Webinar Series
Effective Literacy Interventions
Q&A with Janice Dole, Ph.D.
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In this webinar, Janice A. Dole, Professor and Director of the Reading and Literacy Program in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Utah, discussed different strategies for delivering literacy instruction to meet a range of student needs, including the ways in which teachers can collaborate with reading specialists to achieve this purpose. The [PowerPoint presentation](#) and [webinar recording](#) are available.

1. How can we monitor response to intervention (RTI) for progress and use it for classroom instruction?

Collaboration between Tier 1 and Tier 2 and 3 teachers is essential if the results of RTI are to be used for classroom instruction. Classroom teachers can talk with Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers to find out what is being taught as well as how it is being taught. Classroom teachers can use that knowledge to guide their own instruction. RTI teachers can also assess students on a regular basis to determine which skills students are mastering and which they still need to learn. Classroom teachers can use this information to reinforce newly learned skills as well as to introduce new skills students need. To teach these skills, classroom teachers can use explicit instruction, which includes working with students through guided practice and providing feedback for the student.

2. How do literacy interventions relate to other content areas at the high school level?

The Common Core State Standards emphasize literacy instruction across all content areas. Literacy interventions can focus on those Common Core standards that students need to work on in each of their content areas. Literacy interventions can help students apply their learning to specific content areas, thereby reinforcing the content area in which teachers are working. Providing necessary literacy interventions for students supports them in all content areas because students are expected to read to learn content at this level.

3. What interventions work best for high school students?

Teachers should start by determining where their students are struggling and where there are breakdowns in student understanding. Teachers can assess students on K–3 literacy foundations first if they think students have very little knowledge about literacy (for example, some students who enter this country as refugees). For almost all struggling readers, though, teachers will need to administer diagnostic reading tests to determine the skills or areas where their students need additional support. The What Works Clearinghouse has produced a compendium of literacy interventions and an analysis of the supporting research base (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Publications_Reviews.aspx?f=All%20Publication%20and%20Product%20Types,1;#pubsearch). This report is very helpful for high schools looking for effective intervention

programs. Additionally, there are publications that synthesize the research on the most effective interventions for middle and high school students (see, for example, *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=8>). All of these sources can help high school teachers determine the best interventions for their students.

4. What are the best strategies for literacy interventions for English language learners (ELLs)?

When teaching students of varying demographics, including ELLs, it is important to focus on individualized skills and provide intensive, individualized instruction. Reading aloud, a component of fluency involving oral language, is an extremely beneficial activity for literacy development. Instructional strategies including gestures, role-playing, multimedia, and realia all support ELLs. Teachers of ELLs should include explicit vocabulary instruction, including instruction on multiple meaning words and root words to support students in developing basic language skills. It is also important that literacy instruction for ELL students involves significant opportunities to develop better phonological awareness, the strategies and knowledge needed to comprehend and analyze expository texts, and time for reading and writing practice. Supporting and providing professional development to teachers and personnel at the school and district levels so that they are prepared and qualified to support ELLs in literacy skill development are paramount to student success.

5. How can I reach the needs of my high-level students as well as my ELLs?

To meet the needs of all students, including high-level students and ELLs, it is important to provide students with opportunities to collaborate and work together in small groups. Research suggests that high-level students particularly benefit from working with other high-level students in a collaborative small-group setting. These students can conduct research together and develop presentations that use their newly found knowledge. For ELLs in particular, literacy instruction must include opportunities for discourse and interaction, proficient language modeling and support, and ongoing assessments and feedback to guide learning.

6. Are early literacy interventions effective among traditionally chronic underperformers from families in low-income communities?

Early literacy interventions have been shown to be effective for traditionally chronic underperformers from families in low-income communities by strongly reinforcing the importance of phonics, fluency, vocabulary comprehension, and writing starting in early grades. Instruction in these elements needs to start in kindergarten and continue up the grades. Early Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention needs to come as soon as students start to struggle. If challenges are caught early, struggling readers can catch up and continue to make progress in literacy development.

7. What strategies are most effective for engaging very low-level readers in high school who have experienced many years of discouraging failure?

At all times, teachers of very low-level readers must be cognizant of the students' affective feelings about reading, including their low self-efficacy for reading. Teachers can support students by developing content goals for reading (or providing the purpose for reading), using interesting texts, and offering opportunities for collaboration. To create a sense of purpose, teachers can build student interest by providing background knowledge, assigning stimulating tasks that lead to research, and working with students to develop their own goals. Teachers can choose texts that are appealing and relevant for students. The learning environment should be literacy-rich and motivating to all students. Students can engage in their own learning by self-monitoring their progress using graphs or charts.

Teachers should model self-awareness of their understanding or lack of understanding of a text. Teachers should practice summarizing parts of a text and asking students to agree or disagree with their summaries. Teachers should give examples of their confusion about something they have just read so that students learn to recognize when they do not understand what they have read. Students can work in pairs or individually to summarize pieces of text and realize when they do and do not understand a text. Several specific reading approaches (Reciprocal Teaching, Cognitive Reading Strategies) are particularly helpful for low-level readers and also involve collaboration with their peers.

7. How do you develop reading stamina with upper elementary students ready to complete chapter books?

While stamina is important, emphasis on stamina should not overshadow the importance of reading comprehension and accuracy. Stamina should be developed over time. Teachers should enforce reading stamina skills by asking students to attend and focus for increasing amounts of time over an extended period. Teachers can make a graph to show students how they maintain attention and focus over time—say 5 minutes more each week. Students can see their growth and know that they are working toward the difficult tasks that await them in high school and college.

8. What interventions are recommended for students in grade 3 with limited sight word knowledge and who struggle with basic phonics?

Students who struggle with phonics skills can and should be helped through the extensive use of manipulatives, magnetic letters, and whiteboards. Students can manipulate magnetic letters saying the sounds and placing the letters that represent the sounds on the board. Then students can write the words they make on a sheet of paper. Students can practice writing the letters as they say the sounds on their whiteboards. They have a marker and an eraser so that they can make mistakes and erase them and finally write the correct letters that represent the sounds. Students need extended practice using magnetic letters and manipulating the letters to make different sounds. Extensive practice requires students to see the sounds, say the sounds, and write the sounds. In addition, students can memorize the few sight words they need to read full sentences through the use of flash cards.

9. How can families support literacy interventions?

Parental high expectations for their children provide a most important foundation for their children’s success. Families should set high expectations for their children’s academic progress and expect their children to do well in school. They can do this by modeling their own reading each day—whether it is reading a menu or a newspaper or magazine—and by providing their children with books or bringing them to the library. Family members should read at home to their children up through junior high school. Parents can encourage their children to read to others, including siblings and friends, to show the value they place on reading.

10. How can I conduct effective differentiated literacy activities in an inclusive classroom setting?

Small group work is an effective way to support students at different levels in the same classroom. Students can also work in pairs on specific literacy activities. Students should be encouraged to collaborate with each other and interact with each other to develop skills. Teachers can pull individual students aside for support or work with small groups of students needing additional support on similar skills.

11. With limited instructional time, what reading skills would be the fastest to correct in a middle school classroom and have the greatest impact on literacy and state testing results?

There are almost no skills that are “fastest to correct” at the middle school level. Skill improvement at that level takes time. Fluency is a good skill to work on for those students who are not fluent at that level. The What Works Clearinghouse lists several programs that increase fluency in middle school. Effective fluency programs may be well worth their costs. At that level, it does not take too much time to teach students to predict, to reread, to monitor their comprehension, and to find evidence to support claims made in a text.

12. What is the difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading interventions? What recommendations do you have for implementing each of them?

Tier 2 reading interventions are designed to provide more instruction and practice in just-taught skills. Tier 2 reading interventions occur when teachers catch students just in time and can support them in developing the skills with more practice and instruction. Tier 3 reading interventions are designed to provide intensive support and additional help for students who do not succeed with Tier 2 intervention strategies. Tier 3 interventions usually take longer to implement, should include extra dosages of instruction, should be provided four days per week, and should be provided by a professional with a reading endorsement or a special educator.

A teacher can provide Tier 2 intervention after teaching a reading skill to a large group during the regular literacy block of time. The teacher can pull students from the larger group who appear to need more help in acquiring the skill. A small group of students can be pulled together in this way. The teacher then spends an additional 15–20 minutes on an intervention that provides more instruction of the skill to the small group.

A special educator or a reading specialist provides Tier 3 intervention at a time that allows students to attend all the regular classroom instruction. Thus, Tier 3 intervention occurs before or after school, not during the regular time period that students have instruction. Tier 3 intervention requires one or two additional dosages of instruction on missing skills. Such instruction should be conducted four days per week for a specific, limited time period. At the end of that time, assessments will determine whether students need more intervention and additional time.

13. What is your view on technological devices (such as learning games and apps) versus curricular interventions?

Some technological devices and programs can be used to motivate students. However, it is crucial for the teacher to understand what supports students need and to know the effectiveness of technological devices to ensure that students benefit from the use of them. Technology can serve as a positive reinforcement of skills learned in the classroom, but technology should not be substituted for instruction or intervention.

14. How can we help students struggling with reading comprehension?

One important way to help students struggling with reading comprehension is to use metacognitive strategies so that students can build knowledge and awareness of whether the text is making sense. These strategies include building fix-it strategies so that students know what to do when what they are reading does not make sense. Additional comprehension strategies include building skills to support students in becoming strategic readers by teaching them how to ask questions, how to summarize, and how to visualize. To help students who struggle with comprehension, teachers can provide scaffolding and support and ensure that students are aware of when they do not understand something they are reading. It is almost always important to build and activate background knowledge prior to engaging with a text, especially one that might be difficult for students. Teachers can teach students to apply different strategies for comprehension, such as using graphic organizers, summarization skills, and asking and answering questions. Teachers can use explicit instruction to teach comprehension strategies and teach students how to monitor their own comprehension by modeling for them and teaching them fix-it strategies.

15. How can stations be used effectively when many students need to work on basic skills, but teachers are required to teach higher level skills as well?

By understanding students' skills and realizing where individual students are struggling, teachers can develop reading and writing stations to support previously taught skills. They then can work with students in small groups on new and higher level skills.

16. What number of students do you recommend for implementing small-group interventions?

Groups of two or three are recommended for small group interventions. For students who need more support in certain skills, these smaller groups are more effective.

17. What types of assessments should be used to monitor student progress in literacy interventions?

Reading specialists, teachers, and others supporting reading interventions can use diagnostic assessment to determine students at risk and monitor their progress during the intervention and then administer a summative assessment to students. Assessments such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), AIMS, or Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) can be used in elementary and high school to monitor student progress.

18. What is the best way to monitor a student’s progress in a literacy intervention program?

The best way to monitor a student’s progress is through brief, informal assessments. Assessment determines what students know and do not know and can guide further instruction. Assessments such as DIBELS, AIMS, or CBM can be used in elementary and high school to monitor student progress.

19. What assessments do you suggest so that teachers can get back to teaching and have time to use the data from assessments?

Assessments should be low stakes and be administered on a regular basis so that teachers and interventionists can adjust intervention strategies appropriately. Assessments such as DIBELS, AIMS, or CBM can be used in elementary and high school to monitor student progress.

20. What diagnostic tools for establishing student reading-level baselines do you recommend?

Initial reading-level baselines are useful in understanding students’ literacy strengths and weaknesses. Brief, informal assessments can be used to establish initial reading levels like DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). Scholastic Reading Inventory also provides reading-level baselines.

21. What are effective methods to track reading data?

It is important to maintain consistency in tracking reading data so that a student’s results can be analyzed over time. Early elementary teachers can assess and track reading data by using repeated readings of texts so that they can accurately track student progress over time. Older students can construct their own charts and graphs and track their progress. Tracking their own progress can motivate older students.

22. Why are policymakers implementing so many different curriculum and intervention programs each year, and how can teachers implement these new programs?

Many policymakers want quick fixes to education problems. In addition, many policymakers are influenced by the latest technological trend or education fad. They therefore propose many different interventions and programs for their education constituents. However, policymakers need

to spend more time listening to all sides of education debates and stay updated on the latest research. Policymakers should make decisions regarding curriculum and intervention programs based on the latest research rather than on questionable information from publishers and commercial entities. Policy should not be created and adjusted to reflect the latest trend; it should be based in thorough research and understanding.

23. What data show that it is important for students to be fluent readers by grade 3?

There is a converging set of data to show that students must be fluent readers by the end of grade 3 to be successful in school. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin (Eds.), 1998) is an excellent resource that goes through these data carefully and makes a compelling argument.

24. Will extending the school day and providing the right interventions increase student achievement?

In and of itself, extending the school day has not been shown to *always* increase student achievement. Usually, the day is lengthened in conjunction with other adjustments to improve achievement. However, providing the right interventions (those that have been shown to increase reading achievement through independent research) and implementing them with fidelity does increase student achievement.

25. Who on the school staff is responsible for implementing reading interventions?

Reading specialists, teachers, principals, and all other staff are responsible for implementing reading interventions at the school level. District leaders, policymakers, and higher education and teacher preparation programs also play a role in ensuring that reading interventions are appropriately implemented.

Reading specialists are leaders in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction and must work with classroom teachers and special education teachers to ensure consistency between all tiers. Reading specialists organize and manage successful literacy interventions before and after school. In addition, reading specialists have the job of screening students, administering diagnostic assessments, monitoring progress of identified students, and administering summative assessments of these students.

Teachers must implement the research-based Tier 1 practices in their classrooms and view all students in a school as their responsibility. Teachers also need to collaborate with each other and with other staff.

Principals must provide leadership in implementing the intervention programs; they also must ensure financial support and support instructional leaders in implementing intervention programs.

District leaders should provide guidance to support principals and instructional leaders, while also providing them with professional development. They must also present a consistent vision of where the district is going and present an action plan.

Policymakers must listen to all sides of the debate on education issues and make rational, research-based decisions on best practices.

Higher education and teacher preparation programs must ensure that future educators know and teach students according to the standards and are prepared to learn about and understand local, district, and school priorities and participate in professional development regarding reading interventions.

24. What strategies are most important when teaching students how to search for evidence in a text?

Especially in the K-3 grade span, the best comprehension strategies include metacognitive strategies, which build knowledge and awareness of whether a text is making sense. Fix-it strategies tell readers what to do when the text they are reading does not make sense. It is important for teachers to teach comprehension monitoring strategies, so that students are aware of whether or not they understand what they are reading. By building comprehension strategies, students can evaluate if they are understanding the text they are reading and search for evidence within it.

25. How do you address assessments used for accountability when students are not receiving grade-level curriculum?

Teachers should strive to read some text at grade level with students, even if students are unable to read it independently. By providing scaffolding and support, students can work with grade-level texts with support from the teacher. Students should also work with texts on their instructional and independent reading levels so that they can build their skills. When teachers offer scaffolding and support for higher level texts and also provide appropriate independent and instructional level texts, students are challenged to further develop their skills but do not always feel frustrated because of the level of texts.

26. What do you think about the need to build oral language skills as well as literacy skills?

Oral language is the foundation for written language. Oral language skills allow students to build their reading and writing skills. Classrooms, especially in the early grades, should provide opportunities for students to interact with each other and work on their oral language skills often. Strategies such as “turn and talk” can be used regularly to engage students in oral language development. Providing these opportunities is especially crucial for English language learners.

27. How can a teacher move a student who is struggling with segmenting and blending to read simple texts?

This teacher can instruct students on simple words and sight words. Sight word knowledge is crucial for students to begin reading simple sentences. By teaching basic sight words and including simple blending, students can begin reading simple sentences.

28. How do we teach students to understand when they do not know what they are reading? How do we teach self-monitoring?

The teacher can model for students how to assess if they understand what they read. The teacher can demonstrate to students how to read a text and then try and say it in other words. The teacher can model questions students can ask themselves and strategies students can use to figure out if they understand what they have just read.