How to Reach First-Grade Struggling Readers: An Integrated Instructional Approach

Emily J. Solari, Carolyn A. Denton, and Christa Haring

TEACHING Exceptional Children, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 149–159. Copyright 2017 The Author(s). DOI: 10.1177/0040059916673296

Kristin Campbell is a recent credentialed general education teacher assigned to teach her very first class of first graders. She was beaming with excitement as she completed her bulletin boards, decorated student journals, and greeted children on their first day. However, as the year progressed, she watched as several of her students, most of whom had performed poorly on the first benchmark reading assessment, fell further and further behind. She saw them putting forth a great deal of effort at school while getting increasingly frustrated. Sadly, she even watched as her favorite little struggling reader shut down and stop engaging in school work. Ms. Campbell knew that in her district, as in many districts across the country, students were not typically identified with reading disabilities until after first grade. Ms. Campbell wondered what she could do in her own first-grade classroom to help the struggling students learn basic reading skills before they fell far behind their peers.

Ms. Campbell knew that if she could not help her students master basic reading concepts and feel more successful, their frustration with school would only increase. But she was running out of strategies in her "teacher bag of tricks." She was diligent in making sure her lessons matched the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and many of her students exceeded expectations on those elements. Several students just did not seem to respond to the instruction, no matter how many "reading monsters" or sticker charts she incorporated. Recently, a colleague mentioned that maybe it was not what *she was teaching but the manner in which she was teaching the skills. Ms. Campbell had used a linear approach, teaching one skill to mastery, then another. Now her thoughts turned to the way in which skills such as text reading, comprehension, and fluency worked in concert in her own reading. This left her with many questions about her teaching. How might she teach these skills together in a way that her struggling students would understand, feel successful, and remain engaged when they were still trying to learn basic phonological awareness skills? Was it feasible—for a general educator who had students with many different demands—to implement effective core classroom reading instruction, with additional Tier 2 support for her students who were struggling the most? What would this type of instruction look like in her classroom? When and how could she utilize the expertise of special educators to help her meet the needs of her students who were struggling with reading?*

In the past 30 years, research in the area of reading has grown exponentially. A strong research base exists that demonstrates how teachers can best instruct students who are struggling with foundational reading skills: the early developing skills that set the groundwork for successful reading comprehension. These skills include alphabet knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, decoding, and text-reading fluency. In the CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), these skills are called *foundational skills*. There is also a growing body of evidence to support targeted instruction in listening comprehension, even before students learn to read (Denton, Solari, Ciancio, Hecht, & Swank, 2010; Garner & Bochna, 2004; O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, & Bell, 2005; Solari & Gerber, 2008), and instruction in comprehension skills in tandem with foundational skills (Denton et al., 2010; Solari & Gerber, 2008). This research was informed by converging evidence that there is a significant relation between early listening comprehension and later reading comprehension (Aarnouste, van den Bos, & Brand-Gruwel, 1998; Garner & Bochna, 2004; Nation & Snowling, 2004), suggesting that it may be possible to teach and enhance comprehension through oral skills even before students are able to fluently read connected text. The CCSS are clear that the foundational skills in the early grades should not be taught as a prerequisite to more complex reading skills such as comprehension; both should be taught in tandem. Recently, a practice guide on comprehension instruction published by the Institute of Education Sciences suggested the necessity of directly teaching comprehension strategies in kindergarten through third grade (Shanahan et al., 2010).

Models of reading development, such as the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990), suggest that foundational skills and skills related to early comprehension, such as linguistic comprehension (or listening comprehension), are essential for successful reading development. It is common practice for early reading instruction and intervention programs to focus primarily on foundational skills or word-level instruction, with considerably less time spent on developing comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. This is problematic, given that early struggling readers often have difficulties in comprehension and word-reading development. Some teachers struggle with balancing the demands of supporting word-reading and comprehension development in an effective and efficient manner. Addressing early reading difficulties is important; research demonstrates that students who do not learn to read adequately in the early grades are very

The CCSS are clear that the foundational skills in the early grades should not be taught as a prerequisite to more complex reading skills such as comprehension; both should be taught in tandem.

likely to have persistent reading difficulties (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). If the gap between average readers and students at risk for reading problems is addressed aggressively in the early grades, later-developing reading problems and identification of reading disabilities may be prevented or their severity reduced (Denton & Mathes, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon & Lyon, 2000). To address this need for effective, intensive instruction in early grades for struggling readers, general education teachers and special education teachers must find ways to collaborate within the context of general education settings. The CCSS do not provide clear guidance on how to support at-risk readers in the context of the general education classroom. However, our work in classrooms has informed the development of a model that teachers can follow to implement research-based reading instruction that meet the standards of the CCSS while addressing the unique needs of students who are experiencing difficulty learning to read or have a reading disability. We define struggling readers who are in need of Tier 2 supplemental reading instruction within a multitier system of support (MTSS) or a response to intervention as those who are performing in the bottom 20% in reading-related skills as compared with their classroom peers.

An MTSS model is a framework for instruction that provides increasing support to students based on documented student need. This model typically consists of three tiers of intervention, with each tier providing increasingly more targeted and intense instruction (Gersten et al., 2009). An essential component of MTSS is that all students receive evidence-based reading instruction within general education classrooms as a part of their Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 instruction provides additional reading support for students who are performing in the bottom 20% as compared with their peers. Tier 2 instruction typically consists of small-group instruction with the goal of supporting students in meeting grade-level benchmark scores in reading-related skills. There is some debate in the literature about who is responsible for Tier 2 instruction: whether it is the classroom teacher or another qualified staff member, such as a reading specialist or a special education teacher. We present a framework in which classroom teachers and special education teachers can collaborate to provide Tier 1 and 2 instruction. In an MTSS framework, students who do not respond to evidence-based Tier 1 instruction and more intensive Tier 2 instruction then receive Tier 3 instruction. Tier 3 instruction—which reflects the most intensive individualized level of instruction—typically takes place outside the classroom setting and is implemented by a special education teacher; the model that we present focuses on Tiers 1 and 2.

Reading RULES! supports the development of comprehension and foundational reading skills of first-grade students who struggle with reading.

How Do We Help Struggling Readers Become More Proficient?

In the early grades, it is often difficult to distinguish between (a) students who are struggling with early reading skills because they have a biologically based reading disability and are showing early signs of this through their reading behaviors and (b) students who are struggling readers because of inappropriate instruction or other risk factors. The framework that we propose can be useful for both groups of students as a preventative model to reduce the occurrence of false-positives for reading disability and as a way to foster early reading skills in students who have a biologically based reading disability. We describe a research-validated reading intervention, Reading RULES! (Denton et al., 2016), that provides instruction designed to support the development of comprehension and foundational reading skills of first-grade students who struggle with reading. This instructional framework incorporates a comprehensive model of instruction that is the culmination of several previous studies investigating effective early reading instruction (Denton et al., 2010; Solari & Gerber, 2008); see Table 1 for program characteristics. In a recent study (Solari, Denton, Petscher, & Haring, 2016), students who were identified as at risk for reading failure were randomly assigned to receive either their regular classroom core reading instruction plus Reading RULES! (implemented by general education teachers) or the reading instruction typically provided in their schools. Reading RULES! was implemented for 17 weeks by first-grade classroom teachers, and the progress of at-risk students in the two groups was compared. Students who received Reading RULES! made significantly more growth than those who received typical instruction on nearly all reading assessments. The strongest effects of the intervention were on word reading, decoding, and reading comprehension, as well as fluent reading of sight words, decodable words, and sentences (Solari et al., 2016).

Reading RULES! provides a framework for the implementation of a supplemental reading program that follows the CCSS by integrating instruction in foundational reading skills and comprehension (see Table 2). The framework includes both whole-class comprehension instruction and small-group Tier 2 instruction in comprehension and foundational reading standards for students who are struggling to develop crucial early reading skills. The general education teacher is the main provider of reading instruction in first grade. In the Reading RULES! framework, general education teachers provide Tier 2 supplemental

reading instruction within the context of their own classrooms, based on data-based decision making. It should be noted that literacy coaches and special education teachers, in collaboration with general education teachers, could use a very similar framework if they are charged with implementing Tier 2 instruction. No matter who is providing Tier 2 instruction, it should be targeted to meet the needs of students in foundational reading skills and comprehension. General education teachers in the early primary grades can utilize the expertise of their special education colleagues and, through collaboration, meet the unique needs of students who are at risk for reading difficulties and disabilities.

Basic Principles of an Integrated Reading Framework

In a report from the National Research Council, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) stressed the importance of integrating instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness with comprehension instruction in the context of meaningful reading and writing. They cautioned against simply balancing the amount of time spent in text- and code-based instruction, warning that this could result in a fragmented reading program. Rather, instruction should be integrated for two objectives. First, students learn that the purpose of reading is always to make meaning from text. Second, the foundational skills and strategies that they are learning should be applied anytime they are reading, so that they will be able to correctly read text and also understand the author's message.

As Allington (1983) observed over 30 years ago, "students are more likely to learn what they are taught than what they are not" (p. 548). In particular, students who are having difficulty mastering concepts benefit when their teachers model skills and strategies, clearly explain the content necessary to understand, and then provide opportunities for students to practice. This model is often referred to as a *gradual release of responsibility*, wherein teachers spend time modeling appropriate responses, and then, through guided and independent practice, the burden of answering questions falls to individual students, or the "I do, we do, you all do, you do" process (see Figure 1).

Students experiencing difficulty learning to read require much more practice than typically developing readers. This includes a large amount of purposefully integrated cumulative practice over time that allows students to integrate new learning with what they have learned in the past. This population also benefits from sequential instruction that focuses on key elements and progresses in a careful way from easier to more challenging objectives. Struggling readers benefit from guided practice with immediate feedback, including corrective feedback and positive feedback that reinforces their correct responses, as well as instructional scaffolding that helps them arrive at the correct response themselves (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Feedback and instructional scaffolding should be provided not only when students practice word-reading skills or letter sounds but also when they practice comprehension strategies. Consider that whatever students do over and over again tends to turn into a habit. When struggling readers do not receive timely specific feedback, they tend to practice their mistakes, and these mistakes can turn into bad habits that are hard to break. For example, struggling students should be discouraged from guessing when they come to difficult words. This habit can easily become engrained, and it is the ineffective strategy most used by struggling readers of all ages. Teachers of early readers have a unique responsibility to try to prevent bad habits before they become second nature. In our work, we have encouraged teachers to utilize a three-level approach to corrective feedback (see Table 3). This corrective feedback staircase is flexible and allows teachers to utilize the appropriate level of scaffolding across different reading skills.

To best address the needs of struggling readers, classroom reading instruction should (a) directly teach word identification along with listening and reading comprehension (integrated reading program), (b) provide modeling and practice of key strategies necessary for comprehension of written text, and (c) provide scaffolded practice

Table 1. Characteristics of Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers

- Provide integrated instruction in foundational skills, comprehension, and text reading.
- Administer simple assessments like letter-sound or sight word inventories to find out what at-risk students need to learn.
- Provide purposeful instruction designed to address important objectives based on assessment results.
- Implement whole-group and small-group instruction, as well as partner activities.
- In small groups, plan for active student involvement in hands-on activities and many opportunities to respond and receive feedback.
- Model key skills and strategies and clearly explain key content.
- Provide extended opportunities for practice, including cumulative practice.
- Provide timely feedback so students do not practice their mistakes.
- Provide positive feedback to reinforce accurate or partially accurate responses.
- Provide instructional scaffolding to help students arrive at the correct response.
- Monitor students' mastery of key objectives, and reteach when necessary.

Table 2. A Framework for Integrated Early Reading Instruction

Foundational skills	Text reading	Comprehension
• Provide direct, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics to all students who need it. • Teach phonics elements in a carefully planned order; teach easier elements before more difficult ones. • Introduce sound-spellings in an order that will allow students to read words and sentences very early in their programs. • Provide instruction in small groups to increase at-risk students' opportunities to respond and receive feedback. • In small-group instruction, teach only the sound-spellings and other objectives that students in the group need to learn. • Provide extended opportunities to practice. • Include many hands-on activities using manipulatives such as plastic letters. • Carefully monitor students' practice and provide timely feedback so they do not practice their mistakes.	• Have students read and write connected text for meaningful purposes every day. • Teach students to apply the same word identification and comprehension skills and strategies they are learning while reading connected text. • Have students engage in supported reading with teacher modeling, scaffolding, and feedback on these skills and strategies. • Model and prompt students to self-monitor and correct errors. • Guard against the use of ineffective strategies, such as guessing words. Allowing a struggling reader to persist in a guessing strategy is setting them up for failure. • Employ a variety of fluency-building approaches. • Have students read attractive informational and narrative text that allows them to apply the skills and strategies they are learning. • Provide both decodable and non-decodable text.	• Directly teach comprehension strategies in Grades K–1 through listening comprehension. • Provide comprehension instruction in whole-class and small-group formats. • Introduce and practice one strategy for several lessons before you introduce a new one. • Start with easier strategies and progress to more abstract ones. • Model comprehension strategies through think-alouds. • Provide guided practice through read-alouds. • Provide timely corrective and positive feedback and scaffolding. • Provide cumulative practice that requires students to apply previously taught strategies along with newly introduced strategies. • Prompt and question students to encourage them to consistently apply the same strategies whenever they read connected text.

with word- and text-level skills and connecting to strategies to fluently read and comprehend text.

Comprehension Instruction

Comprehension can be taught effectively through listening comprehension, and early listening comprehension is related to later reading comprehension outcomes (Garner & Bochna, 2004; Nation & Snowling, 2004); therefore, instructional time should target both listening and reading comprehension. In Reading RULES!, comprehension instruction addresses listening comprehension and reading comprehension, with a goal of developing this key dimension of oral language and transferring these skills to written text (see Figure 2).

Many basal reading programs teach comprehension in a fragmented way. These programs provide minimal instruction or practice in one comprehension strategy and jump to another one a few days later. This approach to teaching is contrary to the teaching methods that we know are effective for students with disabilities. Research is clear that explicit systematic instruction has the best effects (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2001; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998). We advocate that teachers (a) begin the year with easier comprehension strategies to set the foundation for more difficult ones and (b) concentrate on each strategy for at least 2 weeks for students to have adequate time and many opportunities to practice, before introducing new ones. For example, the first strategy that we teach is direct recall to answer literal questions, followed by linking ideas in text to

Table 3. Scaffolding Staircase for a Trade Book

Level	Teacher scaffold
Minimal scaffold	Did Molly Lou have a voice that sounded like a bullfrog or did her voice sound like a sweet songbird?
Moderate scaffold	Molly Lou had a voice that sounded like a bull . . . (bullfrog)
Intense scaffold	Molly Lou had a voice that sounded like a bullfrog. Say, "Molly Lou had a voice that sounded like a bullfrog."

Note. Sample guiding question: How is Molly Lou different from the other kids? Book: *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2011).

Figure 1. Gradual release model of teaching

background knowledge. Skills that are taught later in the year include inference making and comprehension monitoring and repair. This developmental approach is based on early research (Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978) that indicated that language develops from literal to inferential. Comprehension questioning can also be organized in this way so that easier types of comprehension skills are taught and mastered before inferential questions. In reality, it is likely that successful comprehension requires many strategies working in concert and that the development of these strategies is not linear. The goal of teaching the strategies in this particular order is to allow children to begin to develop more basic competencies, before moving on to more difficult and abstract strategies. When planning comprehension instruction, teachers should think about comprehension instruction as being cumulative; that is, new strategies build on and extend previous ones. It is likely that all students, even those who are not struggling readers, benefit from this type of explicit and systematic comprehension instruction. Therefore, we suggest that comprehension strategies be introduced in whole-class settings, with extended practice and direct instruction provided in small groups for students who are in need of supplemental Tier 2 instruction.

Whole-class comprehension instruction. Whole-class comprehension instruction can be provided by teachers through brief lessons and book read-alouds. We suggest that teachers devote about 20 minutes per day to whole-class comprehension instruction, which can consist of two types of lessons: anchor lessons and interactive read-alouds. The purpose of anchor lessons is for teachers to model new comprehension strategies using think-alouds and to provide guided practice to support students' understanding of the strategies. Anchor lessons do not utilize read-aloud texts, because the goal is to introduce a comprehension strategy and encourage a deep understanding of the strategy before students are required to apply it to written text. Anchor lessons are then followed by several interactive read-alouds in which teachers model the use of taught comprehension strategies with written text and students receive guided practice in applying them. Read-alouds should include a balance of narrative and informational books. The CCSS urge a 50/50 split between expository and narrative text, even in the early primary grades (CCSS Initiative, 2001).

In a whole-group setting, time spent engaging in read-alouds should be planned and explicit with defined activities before, during, and after reading. Before reading, teachers can preteach a small number of key vocabulary words using pictures to illustrate each word and a child-friendly definition (see sample child friendly definitions in Table 4; Beck & McKeown, 2007). In a simple book introduction, teachers introduce a guiding question that is strategically planned for each text to guide students toward comprehension of important themes or elements. The reason for introducing a guiding question is to provide students with a purposeful way to direct their attention as they listen to the read-aloud. To be most effective, the guiding question should relate to the comprehension strategy that is being taught so that students have practice using the strategy to answer questions about the book. For example, if the teacher is teaching about narrative story elements, the guiding question might be "Who are the main characters and what do they want?" Students are asked to listen carefully to the story and think about the guiding question.

While reading the story aloud, the teacher should plan to stop at predetermined parts of the book to reiterate child-friendly definitions and

Figure 2. Reading RULES! framework for whole-class and Tier 2 instruction elements

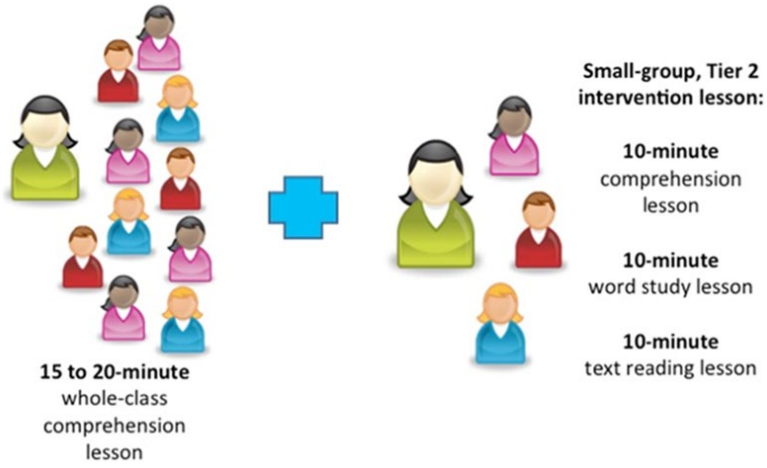

Table 4. Child-Friendly Definitions and In-Text Expansion for Target Vocabulary Words

Word	Child-friendly definition	In-text expansion
stack	*Stack* means to put things on top of each other	Molly Lou's teeth stuck out so much she could stack pennies on them.
squeeze	*Squeeze* means to push something together on both sides	Molly Lou's voice sounded like a frog being squeezed.
glee	When you feel *glee*, it means you feel very happy	The other children smiled with glee because they were so happy to see Molly stack pennies on her teeth.

short expansions of key vocabulary words and to ask students questions that will lead them to answer the guiding question. During reading, teachers can also provide modeling through think-alouds that focus on the comprehension strategy. In the case of the narrative story elements lesson, the teacher can stop at predetermined parts of the book to interact with the children as they identify the characters and their goals. After reading, teachers and students engage in text-based discussion related to the guiding question. For example, the students and teacher would identify the characters and discuss their goals. It is also important to revisit the guiding question after reading. Teachers can say, "Now that we have finished reading, I want to remind you of our guiding question today. I asked you to think about 'Who are the main characters, and what did they want?'" It is important to also provide students with scaffolds that guide them to the correct response (see Table 3 for examples of minimal, moderate, and intense scaffolds).

Small-group Tier 2 comprehension instruction. Small-group comprehension instruction reinforces the same comprehension strategies learned in the whole-group setting and provides struggling readers with additional instruction, more time for practice, and more opportunities to respond with feedback. The link between the whole-group and small-group instruction is vital because it is important for struggling readers to have multiple exposures to new concepts. For example, if the teacher is working on narrative story elements, the small-group instruction would relate back to the whole-group instruction by expanding on the main characters, what it means to be a main character of a story, and what characters wanted. Small-group instruction incorporates materials such as the whole-group read-aloud book, picture cards that show the main characters in the book to elicit conversation, and, frequently, some type of T-chart or graphic organizer. Teachers can also spend time expanding on vocabulary words by providing explanations of the words in different contexts and engaging in vocabulary activities with the target words from the read-aloud.

Tier 2 Foundational Skills Instruction

Word-reading instruction. For students who are struggling with decoding in first grade, explicit systematic instruction in small groups has been found to be effective (Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Torgesen, 2004). Tier 2 word study instruction should provide students with challenging but engaging ways to learn skills in five foundational areas: phonemic awareness, letter sound instruction, sound analysis and spelling, decoding, and high-frequency word recognition. Across each of these five strands, activities progress sequentially from easier to more challenging objectives. The scope and sequence begin with a single letter sound and the word *I* and progress sequentially to consonant blends, multisyllable word reading, inflectional endings, contractions, the silent *e* pattern, *r*-controlled vowels, and beginning vowel teams. Phonemic awareness activities progress from "stretching" words to a challenging task in which students must say a word with one sound deleted.

In sound analysis and spelling instruction, students listen for the sounds in words and spell them using the sound-spelling patterns they are learning. In later lessons, they learn a few simple spelling rules, such as doubling a final consonant in some words before adding an inflectional ending. Each instructional activity should include direct modeling and explanation, guided practice with teacher feedback and scaffolding, and independent practice. Finally, students apply what they are learning through reading connected meaningful text that reinforces the skills taught in each lesson.

For struggling readers, direct systematic instruction in small groups across the entire school year is essential, because these students tend to need a lot of focused reading support to catch up to their peers who do not struggle in reading. It is also important for teachers to understand where their students begin the year in terms of foundational skills, to monitor their growth across the school year, and to make instructional decisions based on student data (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005). There are several publically available monitoring tools that classroom teachers can use to monitor their students response to the

Table 5. Sample Scaffold Script for What to Do When Students Encounter an Unknown Word: *Spin*

Step 1: Look for parts you know—Have children look for parts of the word that they already recognize, including letter patterns	*Ms. Campbell*: Let's see if there is anything I know in this word. It is my turn. I know /s/.
Step 2: Sound it out—Have children sound out the parts of the words that they are able to sound out.	*Ms. Campbell*: I can read the first letter /s/. Now, I can try to sound out the rest of the word. Let's stretch it out together slowly /s/ /p/ /i/ /n/. *Students together with Ms. Campbell*: /s/ /p/ /i/ /n/ *Ms. Campbell*: What word does it make? *Students:* spin
Step 3: Check it in context—Have student check the word in context of the text to make sure it makes sense.	*Ms. Campbell*: Now, let's go back to the book and see if our word makes sense. The book says, "Fran likes to spin." Does this make sense?

instruction they are providing in Tier 2 instruction in word-level skills (e.g., AimsWeb, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, EdChekup).

Text-reading instruction. Text reading is the "bridge" between the comprehension and foundational skills segments of an integrated reading program—the key to providing truly integrated instruction rather than a fragmented reading program. Students apply the same comprehension and decoding skills and strategies that they are learning in other portions of the reading curriculum as they read connected text with teacher modeling, scaffolding, and feedback. We refer to this specialized kind of reading practice as "supported reading." Students with reading difficulties cannot be expected to automatically generalize what they learn during foundational skills instruction or comprehension instruction when they read and write connected text; they must be taught to do so.

To provide guided application of comprehension strategies during text-reading instruction, the teacher provides a book introduction to focus attention on a guiding question related to the day's comprehension instruction. For example, for the unit on narrative story elements, the teacher might say, "Remember that stories normally have a problem—when something is wrong or the main characters want something they can't get. Today we'll read to answer this question: What is Mr. Mole's problem?" Next, the teacher provides modeling and scaffolding as students apply the skill/strategy during reading (e.g., Does Mr. Mole have a problem on this page?). After reading, students and the teacher engage in text-based discussion of the guiding question and how the strategies they learned helped them understand what they were reading (e.g., What was Mr. Mole's problem? Why was that a problem for him?).

During reading, the teacher also provides modeling, prompting, and scaffolding to guide students to apply decoding skills and strategies. It is important that students have access to text in which they have many opportunities to practice the decoding elements that they are learning during their word study instruction. If students are being provided with systematic word study instruction that explicitly teaches the relation between phonology and orthography, teachers will be able to apply familiar strategies for sounding out words. It is possible for teachers to use the following three-part strategy whenever students encounter unknown words: (a) "Look for parts you know," (b) "Sound it out," and (c) "Check it in context to be sure it makes sense." Teachers can help students to attend closely to the meaning of the text, with an emphasis on comprehension monitoring and self-correction when decoding errors impede meaning (see Table 5 for a sample script on how to teach students to sound out an unknown decodable word). This single three-part strategy can be taught from the earliest lessons through teacher modeling so that students internalize the strategy and it becomes automatic. Difficulty with selecting and flexibly applying cognitive strategies is a common characteristic of students with reading difficulties. To promote fluency, including prosody, rate, and accuracy, teachers use a progression of instructional strategies, progressing from simplest to most complex. Table 6 illustrates the progression of the text fluency activities.

As students become more proficient decoders and fluent readers, we recommend that they have experience applying their decoding and comprehension strategies in nondecodable texts, with teacher

This instructional framework allows teachers to tailor lessons to the needs of each small group.

Table 6. Progression of Fluency-Building Activities for Student Who Need Tier 2 Instruction

1. At the beginning level, model reading smoothly and expressively and tell students you are "making it sound like talking"; then they model word-by-word "robot reading." Prompt students to "make it sound like talking" when they read and remind them, "No robot reading!"
2. Teach the meaning of punctuation marks and model and guide students to apply them to support phrased, expressive reading.
3. Model grouping words into 2-4 word phrases; provide guided practice and prompt students to read in phrases during text reading.
4. Teach a routine for partner-reading and have students practice fluent reading in familiar text with their partners.
5. Implement timed repeated reading, in which students read for 1 minute and try to read more words correctly on successive readings than they did on their own previous readings. Students compete with their own previous scores, not with other students.

support, to generalize to the kinds of text that they read across the school day; aligned with the CCSS, these should be both narrative and expository texts. This may be best done in science or social studies books. However, care must be taken to have struggling readers practice these texts with teacher feedback so they do not lapse into a guessing strategy. Students should be told the difficult words that they are unable to read, without guessing. After reading, students can paraphrase the text by asking themselves, "What did I learn in this part?" and answering the question in their own words without looking back at the book.

Experience of Teachers Implementing the Reading RULES! Framework

Teachers who have implemented the Reading RULES! framework have been able to implement both the whole-group instruction and the small-group instruction with high fidelity and documented student success (Solari et al., 2016). During our initial implementation of the intervention, several teachers received coaching support to encourage fidelity to the curriculum and to strategize about how to fit the Tier 2 instruction into their daily routines. Professional development sessions were also provided for instruction and time to practice new activities, comprehension skills, and texts. Although these opportunities were useful for teachers new to the curriculum, feedback and data suggested that the most impactful professional development tactic was allowing teachers to observe other educators during real-time, in-class lessons. It was after the school site visits that teachers made the greatest improvement to their pacing and implementation of the program. It is possible that special education teachers, who are typically more prepared to address the needs of students with reading disabilities, could collaborate with general education teachers to implement the proposed framework. It is also possible that the special educators could troubleshoot with general education teachers when students are not responding to the supplemental Tier 2 instruction. Having special educators actively involved in supporting the implementation of Tier 2 instruction in general education classrooms allows for teachers to collaborate to address the needs of these students. This model also allows special education teachers to be tuned in to students who may not be responding to Tier 2 instruction, allowing for early identification and more intensive intervention. In the Reading RULES! framework, systematic instruction is provided at both the word level (word study and text reading) and the text level (vocabulary and comprehension), so it is possible that special education teachers could identify specific reading difficulties for students who are not responding to Tier 2 instruction and then provide more targeted Tier 3 instruction, as necessary.

Skills such as word decoding and listening comprehension develop simultaneously and should be taught as such, rather than in succession.

This instructional framework provides research-based early reading instruction in a sequential order but allows teachers to tailor lessons to the needs of each small group. The framework is also responsive to the standards outlined in the CCSS in that foundational skills and comprehension instruction occur in tandem, in a systematic explicit manner. Group comprehension should be clearly laid out, but teachers also have the freedom to add their own "teaching moments" or additional vocabulary words to the lesson as deemed necessary. This approach lets teachers incorporate the evidence-based practices with high fidelity but provides them the flexibility to customize instruction for individual learners. Small-group instruction consists of explicit instruction and fast-paced game-like practice activities. Some teachers in our study used timers to ensure that all small group components were completed in the allotted 10-minute window. This

encouraged teachers and students to quickly learn and complete tasks with accuracy.

Closing Thoughts

Skills such as word decoding and listening comprehension develop simultaneously and should be taught as such, rather than in succession. In fact, longitudinally, middle school students with poor comprehension often have an inverse relationship in word-reading skills that can be traced to similar patterns of deficits in early elementary grades (Catts & Weismer, 2006). Teaching the skills and strategies required to create fluent readers and comprehenders requires finesse, if a teacher is to remain responsive to the needs of students, especially those experiencing difficulty learning to read. Although there is no one-size-fits-all model, integrating foundational skills as set forth by the CCSS and teaching them in concert with comprehension skills increases engagement and mastery, both of which prompt student success.

Ms. Campbell was overwhelmed about the thought of implementing effective Tier 2 instruction for her students who were most at risk for reading failure. But in collaboration with the special education teacher, she began implementing the Reading RULES! framework with her classes. Through this process, Ms. Campbell has learned that using CCSS and evidence-based curricula is an important component of planning and implementing instruction but is not the entire story. By providing daily work with word decoding, practice with text reading, and specific comprehension skill instruction, her students have developed the skills necessary to become fluent readers and comprehenders. Of equal importance, Ms. Campbell found that by implementing a comprehensive evidence-based reading program in her classroom (that includes Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction), she identified which students continued to struggle and were most likely in need of more intensive individualized support. She felt more confident about referring these students for evaluation for special education services and was delighted to see gains across her group of Tier 2 students.

References

Aarnoust, C. A. J., Van Den Bos, K. P., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (1998). Effects of listening comprehension training on listening and reading. *Journal of Special Education*, *32*, 115–126.

Allington, R. L. (1983). The reading instruction provided readers of differing reading abilities. *The Elementary School Journal*, *83*, 548–559.

Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (2007). Increasing young low-income children's oral vocabulary repertoires through rich and focused instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, *107*, 251–271. doi:10.1086/511706

Blank, M., Rose, S. A., & Berlin, L. J. (1978). The language of learning: The preschool years. Philadelphia, PA: Grune & Stratton.

Catts, H. W., & Weismer, S. E. (2006). Language deficits in poor comprehenders: A case for the simple view of reading. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *49*, 278–293. doi:10.1044/1092-4388(2006/023)

Coyne, M. D., Kame'enui, E. J., & Simmons, D. C. (2001). Prevention and intervention in beginning reading: Two complex systems. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *16*, 62–73. doi:10.1111/0938-8982.00008

Denton, C. A., Beegle, R., Solari, E. J., Madsen, K. (2016). Reading RULES Grade 1: A Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention in word study, text reading, vocabulary, and comprehension. Houston, TX: The Children's Learning Institute.

Denton, C. A., & Mathes, P. G. (2003). Intervention for struggling readers: Possibilities and challenges. In B. R. Foorman (Ed.), *Preventing and remediating reading difficulties: Bringing science to scale* (pp. 229–251). Timonium, MD: York Press.

Denton, C. A., Solari, E. J., Ciancio, D. J., Hecht, S. A., & Swank, P. R. (2010). A pilot study of a kindergarten summer school reading program in high-poverty urban schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, *110*, 423–439. doi:10.1086/651190

Francis, D. J., Shaywitz, S. E., Stuebing, K. K., Shaywitz, B. A., & Fletcher, J. M. (1996). Developmental lag versus deficit models of reading disability: A longitudinal, individual growth curves analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *88*, 3. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.88.1.3

Garner, J. K., & Bochna, C. R. (2004). Transfer of a listening comprehension strategy to independent reading in first-grade students. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *32*, 69–74. doi:10.1007/s10643-004-1071-y

Gersten, R. M., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2009). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to intervention and multi-tier intervention in the primary grades*. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences.

Gersten, R., Fuchs, L. S., Williams, J. P., & Baker, S. (2001). Teaching reading comprehension strategies to students with learning disabilities: A review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, *71*, 279–320. doi:10.3102/00346543071002279

Gough, P., & Tunmer, W. (1986). Decoding, reading and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, *7*, 6–10. doi:10.1177/074193258600700104

Hoover, W. A., & Gough, P. B. (1990). The simple view of reading. *Reading and Writing, 2, 127–160*. doi:10.1007/BF00401799

Lovell, P. (2011). *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*. London, England: Penguin.

Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J. (2004). Beyond phonological skills: Broader language skills contribute to the development of reading. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *27*, 342–356.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.

O'Connor, R. E., Fulmer, D., Harty, K. R., & Bell, K. M. (2005). Layers of reading intervention in kindergarten through third grade changes in teaching and student outcomes. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *38*, 440–455. doi:10.1177/00222194050380050701

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: IES practice guide*. (Report

No. *NCEE 2010-4038)*. Princeton, NJ: What Works Clearinghouse.
Solari, E. J., Denton, C. A., Petscher, Y., & Haring, C. (2016). *A pilot study of first grade Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention in word reading and comprehension*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
Solari, E. J., & Gerber, M. M. (2008). Early comprehension instruction for Spanish-speaking English language learners: Teaching text-level reading skills while maintaining effects on word-level skills. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *23*, 155–168. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5826.2008.00273.x
Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
Stecker, P. M., Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2005). Using curriculum-based measurement to improve student achievement: Review of research. *Psychology in the Schools*, *42*, 795–819. doi:10.1002/pits.20113
Swanson, H. L., & Hoskyn, M. (1998). Experimental intervention research on students with learning disabilities: A meta-analysis of treatment outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, *68*, 277–321. doi:10.3102/00346543068003277
Torgesen, J. K. (2004). Lessons learned from research on interventions for students who have difficulty learning to read. In P. McCardle & V. Chhabra (Eds.), *The voice of evidence in reading research*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
Torgesen, J. K., & Burgess, S. R. (1998). Consistency of reading-related phonological processes throughout early childhood: Evidence from longitudinal-correlational and instructional studies. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning reading* (pp. 161–188). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
Vaughn, S., Gersten, R., & Chard, D. J. (2000). The underlying message in LD intervention research: Findings from research syntheses. Exceptional Children, *67*, 99–114.
Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., & Lyon, G. R. (2000). Differentiating between difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor readers more evidence against the IQ-achievement discrepancy definition of reading disability. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *33*, 223–238.

Authors' Note

This research was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R324A100129 to the University of Texas Health Science Center Houston. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education.

Emily J. Solari, *Associate Professor, University of California Davis.* **Carolyn A. Denton**, *Professor, The Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston.* **Christa Haring**, *Assistant Research Professor, University of South Florida, Tampa.*

Address correspondence concerning this article to Emily J. Solari, University of California Davis, One Shields Ave, Davis, CA 95616 (e-mail: ejsolari@ucdavis.edu).

TEACHING Exceptional Children, *Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 149–159.*