

What Science has taught us about instructional goals in reading for adults



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Adult Basic Education Summit, March, 2004

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Topics for this presentation:

1. What are the primary causes of poor reading skills in adults?
2. What should be the “targets” of instruction to improve literacy in adults
3. How can we work most efficiently to increase reading skills in adults?

Primary causes of poor reading in adults

1. May have a learning disability such as dyslexia – received insufficiently powerful instruction—got off to a very poor start and never recovered
2. May have entered school with very poor preparation for learning to read, and been “left behind” because of inadequate instruction—got off to a very poor start and never recovered.
3. May not have valued literacy, may have attended school sporadically, might have generally low learning ability – received insufficiently powerful instruction, got off to a poor start and never recovered.

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What skills are required to be a good reader?

Reliable strategies for identifying unknown words in text

Phonemic analysis- “phonics”

Other analytic strategies

Guessing from the context

What skills are required to be a good reader?

Anyone who is still learning to read has very frequent encounters with words they have never seen before in print.

Unless they have been taught how to “decipher” these unknown words, they will be frustrated by making too many errors, and they will not become fluent readers

After reviewing recent educational, psychological, linguistic, and neurobiological research on reading, 5 eminent scientists recently concluded:

“From all these different perspectives, two inescapable conclusions emerge. The first is that mastering the alphabetic principle is essential to becoming proficient in the skill of reading....”
(Rayner, et al., 2001)

Raynor, K., Foorman, B.R., Perfetti, C.A., Pesetsky, D., & Seidenberg, M.S. 2001. How psychological science informs the teaching of reading. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2: 31-73.

3rd Grade passage

_____ the middle _____, it was the
_____ for a _____ to wear his full
set of _____ whenever he
_____ in _____ - even in times
of _____! When a _____ believed
he was _____ friends, he would
_____ his _____. This _____
of _____ showed that the
_____ felt _____ and safe.

3rd Grade passage

During the middle ages, it was the custom for a knight to wear his full set of armor whenever he appeared in public - even in times of peace!

When a knight believed he was among friends, he would remove his helmet.

This symbol of friendship showed that the knight felt welcome and safe.

Facts about reading from scientific research:

The most efficient way to make an “accurate first guess” of the identity of a new word is:

First, do phonemic analysis and try an approximate pronunciation

Then, close in on the exact right word by selecting a word with the right sounds in it, that also makes sense in the passage

What skills are required to be a good reader?

Reliable strategies for identifying unknown words in text

Must know many thousands of words “by sight” to be a fluent reader

What is a “sight word”?

“Sight words include any word that readers have practiced reading sufficiently often to be read from memory” (Ehri, 2002)

Adults must correctly pronounce words 5-10 times before they become “sight words”

To be a fluent reader, an adult must be able to recognize most of the words in a passage “by sight”

These are iNTirEStinG and cHallinGinG times for anyone whose pRoFEshuNle responsibilities are rEelaTed in any way to liTiRucY outcomes among school children. For, in spite of all our new NaWLEGe about reading and reading iNstRukshun, there is a wide-spread concern that public EdgUkAshuN is not as eFfEktlve as it shoold be in tEechHiNg all children to read.

The report of the National Research Council pointed out that these concerns about literacy derive not from declining levels of literacy in our schools but rather from recognition that the demands for high levels of literacy are rapidly accelerating in our society.

What skills are required to be a good reader?

Reliable strategies for identifying unknown words in text

Must know many thousands of words “by sight” to be a fluent reader

Must know the meanings of many thousands of words

Important facts about difference in vocabulary

First-grade children from higher SES groups know about twice as many words as lower SES children

High school seniors near the top of their class knew about four times as many words as their lower performing classmates

High-knowledge third graders have vocabularies about equal to lowest-performing 12th graders

Individual differences in vocabulary have a powerful impact on reading comprehension beginning about third grade

If the goal is to attain proficient reading skills, then vocabulary instruction will be a challenge

There are 26 letters to learn

There are 44 phonemes to worry about

There are 8,400 root words to know by 5th grade

Because of their age and experience, most adults will know most of the words in the text they are reading up until about 4th-5th grade level—when reading vocabulary diverges dramatically from spoken vocabulary.

What skills are required to be a good reader?

Reliable strategies for identifying unknown words in text

Must know many thousands of words “by sight” to be a fluent reader

Must know the meanings of many thousands of words

Must know how to “think” while reading – reading strategies

Comprehension Strategies

- Thinking activities that are used to increase comprehension or repair it when it breaks down



What must we teach adults if we want them to become good readers?

1. We must teach them the knowledge and skills required to identify unknown words in text
2. We must help them learn to accurately recognize many thousands of words “at a single glance
3. We must help them to understand the meanings of the words they will be encountering in their reading material
4. We must help them to “think about meaning” at the same time they are identifying the words, so they can comprehend

Do adults really need to learn to read in the same way that young children do?

Our best answer to the question at present is YES.

In order to become skilled readers, adults need to learn the same set of skills and knowledge that are required for reading growth in children

However, adults come to us with many different goals and levels of skill, so we need to have individualized plans

Goals for adult literacy instruction

I want to read to my children....

I want to be able to read the bible....

I want to go to technical school.....

I want to read the newspaper.....

I want to not have to depend on my wife to read my manuals for me....

I want to get my GED....

What are the most serious challenges faced by adults who have not yet acquired good reading skills?

1. They still do not understand how letters are used to represent the sounds in words and cannot reliably “decode” print accurately.
2. Their reading is so slow and labored that they do not enjoy reading, and they have difficulty concentrating on the meaning of what they read
3. Their background knowledge and vocabulary are so limited that it is hard for them to understand what they read

No matter what the goal, we want them to be able to read with reasonable accuracy

If they are extremely weak in phonics – we need to identify what they don't know and teach it to them.

Phonographix, Lindamood

If they have 3rd- 4th grade skills, we need to teach them how to attack multisyllable words and apply word analysis in context

The DISSECT strategy- Strategies
Intervention Model

Word Identification Strategy

- Discover the context
- Isolate the prefix
- Separate the suffix
- Say the stem
- Examine the stem
- Check with someone
- Try the dictionary

Do we need to teach phonemic awareness as an oral language skill to adults to prepare them for “phonics”?

Probably not

Except in extreme cases of phonological disability (dyslexia), adults should be able to acquire phonemic awareness through good phonics instruction

If we want them to read more fluently, we must help them to read more words “by sight”

Learning to read lots of words “at a single glance”

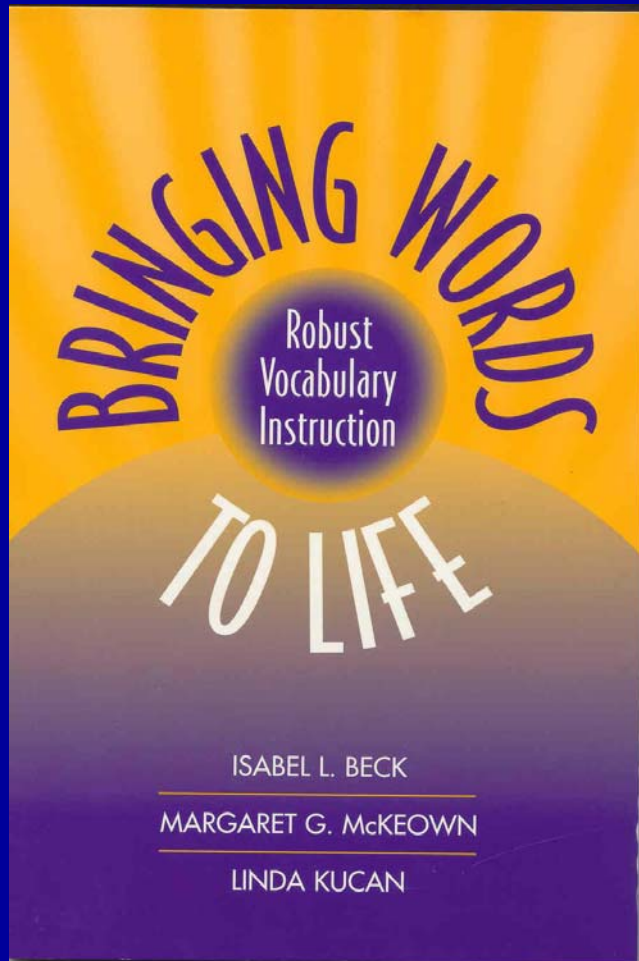
Focused practice with words from the 1,000 most frequent – “Teacher’s Book of Lists”

Focused practice with words from the kind of texts they will be reading

Repeated, timed reading of phrases and paragraphs from the texts they will be reading

If we want them to read more complex text
with understanding....

Teach vocabulary and reading strategies



Bringing
Words to Life

Isabel Beck

M. McKeown

L. Kucan

Guilford Press

Big ideas from “Bringing Words to Life”

Research has discovered much more powerful ways of teaching vocabulary than are typically used in classrooms

A “robust” approach to vocabulary instruction involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, interactive follow-up.

Helping adults to increase their reading comprehension using research-based strategies

Before Reading

Activate prior knowledge

Preview headings

During Reading

Visual imagery

Comprehension monitoring

After Reading

Summarize in own words

Ask clarifying questions

The “Paragraph Shrinking” activity

Learning to identify and state the main idea

1. Name the who or what (the main person, animal, place, or thing the selection is about)
2. Tell the most important thing about the who or what
3. Say the main idea in 10 words or less

What can we expect from high quality interventions with adults?

Most should be able to acquire beginning word analysis strategies relatively quickly (15-60 hrs), depending on where they start, which will increase their reading accuracy and independence

Reading fluency will take longer to acquire, and will depend a lot on their willingness to practice

Comprehension will increase as their reading accuracy and fluency grows, and will also be helped as they learn to think actively while they read

A concluding thought....

There is no evidence for a biological "critical period" in the development of reading skills that makes it harder for adults to learn than children

However, we all know that it will take steady determination and sufficient time and practice for illiterate adults to become fluent readers

If we will work with focus and determination to apply new knowledge about reading to our work with adults, we will find ever increasing levels of success.

The End

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Science of Reading