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## Spelling

Many of the component skills involved in word identification play a role in spelling as well. These component abilities include **phonological** and **phonemic awareness** and **letter-sound knowledge**. As noted earlier, invented spelling, in which children combine phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge and their developing understanding of the alphabetic principle to spell words phonetically, is typical of children at the earliest stages of reading and provides a valuable information source for teachers. However, invented spellings should not be used as reading material for children.

Many children will require feedback and coaching from the teacher in order to develop their abilities to use letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness in spelling. For example, a child who is struggling with spelling the initial sound of a word might be encouraged to watch the teacher's mouth as he or she says the word (i.e., use articulatory cues), or the teacher might help the child "stretch" a difficult word by saying it aloud slowly and stretching the sounds.

**Conventional spelling of grade-appropriate words** also must be explicitly taught. Drawing children's attention to word families (e.g., make, cake, shake) and common letter patterns within words (e.g., /shun/ at the end of a long word often is spelled tion) may be helpful (Adams & Bruck, 1995). In addition, certain common spelling generalizations, such as how to spell words with endings (e.g., when -ing is added to a silent e word such as shake, the final e is dropped) are very useful. And children need to learn to spell common homophones correctly (e.g., to, two, too).

As children advance beyond beginning stages of reading and writing, it is especially useful to draw their attention to **morphological and structural relationships** among words (e.g., heal, health, nation, national, international; vision, visible, invisible). For example, a child who is struggling to spell national might be helped if the teacher pointed out the word's relationship to nation. This approach helps to foster vocabulary knowledge as well as spelling and reading.

## Writing

As noted earlier, writing and reading are connected, and writing can be used to foster reading achievement in many ways. However, writing and reading are also important domains in their own right and need individual attention; reading cannot be taught solely through writing, or writing through reading. One important difference between reading and writing is that the latter relies more heavily on expressive language than does the

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former; for example, writing requires children to think about an audience and about communicating ideas clearly to another person.

Important components of writing instruction include **organizing and communicating ideas** (e.g., writing that is logically sequenced); **using descriptive language and elaboration**; **sentence structure** (e.g., writing complete and varied sentences); and **mechanics** (e.g., capitalization, punctuation, spelling, handwriting). Expectations in these areas increase greatly as children progress from kindergarten through third grade.

Many reading-related competencies also play important roles in writing. For example, sensitivity to text structure is as important to writing as to reading comprehension. If children have encountered a variety of text structures in their reading, and are sensitive to those structures, they can use them in their own writing. Similarly, learning new vocabulary should involve using words in writing as well as in reading.

Just as children need explicit teaching of basic skills in reading, they also need explicit teaching of writing skills, not only mechanical conventions like punctuation, but also skills related to clear communication of ideas. Furthermore, they need to be encouraged to apply the basic skills they are learning to their writing through frequent proofreading, revision and editing of their work. Finally, as in reading, children need many opportunities to write, especially opportunities involving feedback and coaching from the teacher.

## **Other Important Considerations In A Comprehensive Curriculum**

### **Fostering Motivation To Read And Write**

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Effective primary-level teachers of reading not only provide a comprehensive curriculum that addresses both basic skills and higher-level abilities, but they also foster motivation in children at a variety of achievement levels (Pressley, Rankin & Yokoi, 1996; Ruddell, 1995). **Schools and school districts must ensure that teachers have adequate access to a variety of books**, because this access is as important in fostering children's motivation to read as it is to developing their reading fluency and comprehension. To keep motivation alive, children need to experience success in reading, so teachers must be able to match books to individual children's instructional and independent reading levels. Teachers also need access to books involving a variety of genres, topics and themes, including multicultural themes and characters.

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Teachers who are effective motivators encourage children to bring books home from school and share books with their families; these teachers create a reading-rich classroom environment; they encourage children to know and use their school and public libraries. Rather than emphasizing extrinsic rewards, such as prizes (e.g., giving children money for reading a specified number of books), these teachers stress books themselves as rewards (Gambrell, 1996). Motivation to read also can be fostered by allowing children choices of reading materials (e.g., permitting children to choose their own books for class projects or for independent reading); increasing their familiarity with authors and illustrators (e.g., encouraging children to seek out other books by the author of a book they enjoyed); and using peer recommendations, such as having children share their favorite books with the class (Gambrell, Codling & Palmer, 1996).

A teacher's ability to make a book come alive when reading to children is very important in motivating children to read. Teachers' attitudes toward books and reading often are mimicked by children. Fostering motivation also requires that teachers be sensitive to the causes of motivational problems. A loss of motivation that results primarily from achievement difficulties (e.g., the child is struggling in books that are too hard) has a different remedy than a loss of motivation that stems from inadequate access to books of interest.

## **Classroom Management**

Providing effective classroom reading instruction involves managing groups of children, so grouping practices are a key consideration in any reading program. For reading instruction to be effective, teachers sometimes must work with children in small groups that are based upon children's instructional needs. These needs include providing an appropriate level of challenge to high-achieving students as well as additional attention or practice to struggling readers. However, grouping practices must be flexible, not rigid. Groups should be reconstituted frequently, based upon ongoing assessment of children's progress. Also, groups sometimes should be formed based on factors other than instructional needs—for example, based on interests (e.g., a group of children who are all interested in dinosaurs might work together on a group project, with different children reading different books about dinosaurs). Some instructional activities, such as reading aloud to children and discussing books, lend themselves naturally to larger groups.

To manage groups of children effectively, teachers must know how to adapt instruction to meet individual differences in important reading-related competencies. For example, some kindergartners may need more

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instruction in phonological awareness than do other children, but may be highly capable (and even well above average) in their listening comprehension for stories the teacher reads orally. Other children may have good phonological awareness, but may require extra instruction in vocabulary or basic print concepts. Instruction should target individual children's specific areas of weakness and should capitalize as much as possible on individual children's strengths.

As discussed previously, instruction in different areas of reading—word identification, fluent and accurate word identification in context, comprehension, spelling and writing—must be coordinated into a coherent, well-integrated program. Moreover, reading instruction also should be coordinated and integrated with other curricular areas, such as social studies and science.

### **Assessment**

Ongoing assessment of the areas that form a comprehensive reading curriculum is essential. It is important to differentiate this kind of assessment from other kinds of testing, such as testing to determine eligibility for special education services. **The purpose of ongoing assessment is to guide instruction.** For example, entering kindergartners' phonological awareness and familiarity with print concepts should be assessed so that kindergarten teachers can plan instruction in these areas. Ongoing assessment does not have to be excessively time consuming, and it may involve many techniques that teachers already are using, such as periodic checks on kindergartners' knowledge of letter sounds, analysis of children's invented spellings or periodic writing prompts for older children. Ongoing assessment needs to be organized, planned and frequent, so that children's difficulties can be addressed early. Effective assessment requires knowledge about a variety of assessment tools and how to interpret them, as well as the understanding that assessment should occur over time. Consultation with a variety of specialists—such as reading specialists, speech and language pathologists, and special educators—may be helpful to classroom teachers in their assessment of children.

A particularly useful tool in ongoing assessment of groups of children involves considering specific indicators for teacher intervention. These are signs, based on current research on reading, that a child's difficulties warrant particularly close monitoring and individualized attention from the teacher. The indicators for teacher intervention will be discussed in detail in Section II of this report.

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## The Role Of Library Media Specialists

As mentioned at the outset of this report, specialists can serve as valuable resources in helping K-3 teachers to establish an effective and comprehensive reading program. One resource that has frequently been underutilized involves library media specialists. School library media specialists can provide information about a wide variety of books at a range of reading levels, such as books on a particular topic that is being studied in the classroom. They can alert teachers to individual books or book series that may be particularly appropriate to children with a given interest or taste in books (e.g., if you liked *Stuart Little* by E. B. White you might also like Beverly Cleary's *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* series). Library media specialists can be excellent sources of information about alternative texts, such as children's magazines and newspapers, or computer-based materials, such as software programs and the Internet. And they also can play a role in instruction; for example, they can develop comprehension skills by reading to children and discussing books with them. In collaboration with the classroom teacher, the library media specialist may supplement classroom instruction with such specific interventions as *Questioning the Author...* (Beck et al., 1996) or "Reciprocal Teaching..." (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

The importance of **public libraries** also should not be overlooked. Librarians in the public library work with parents and their infant or preschool children, through story time and other parenting programs, to develop critical emergent literacy skills which will help children to come to kindergarten ready to learn to read. Public libraries rely almost entirely on motivation to attract children; thus, they have well-developed programs for motivating readers. Most public libraries run summer- or after-school reading programs, storytelling, author programs and book discussion programs. When public schools and libraries coordinate their efforts, many more children participate in these programs, including reluctant or poor readers who tend to read little outside of school. When teachers are knowledgeable about what is happening at the public library, they can encourage library programs as a supplement to what children are learning at school. Additionally, public libraries employ library professionals in children's rooms, who are specially trained to understand children's developmental and reading needs. More than 200 of Connecticut's elementary schools do not employ library media specialists, and for these schools the public children's librarian may be consulted for the same types of information that might otherwise be provided by a school library media specialist.

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## The Role Of Reading Specialists

***Reading specialists should not confine their efforts to remedial students alone.***

A reading specialist can be a valuable resource for the classroom teacher, not only in diagnosis and assessment of student needs, but in staff development (e.g., modeling effective instructional strategies). The reading/language arts consultant has advanced training in clinical practices, in addition to supervision and administration of the classroom program. A two-year study by the Connecticut Association for Reading Research (Klein, Monti, Mulcahy-Ernt & Speck, 1997) concluded that schools with the most effective reading instructional programs and highest reading achievement used reading/language arts consultants for professional development of their teachers; they did not confine reading specialists to remedial students alone. One of the consultant's roles is to provide for a well-articulated classroom instructional program, assisting classroom teachers through modeling lessons for interventions and strategies such as reciprocal teaching, literature circles, guided reading, KWL, SQ3R, etc. The consultant can help the classroom teacher with organizing flexible groupings according to student needs. In addition, the consultant can diagnose the needs of struggling readers and assist the classroom teacher with appropriate interventions, either in the classroom, or, if necessary, outside the classroom with supplementary instruction. The reading/language arts consultant may work in collaboration with other specialists, such as reading recovery teachers, speech and language pathologists, special educators and school psychologists, to provide appropriate intervention strategies for students in need.

## Early Intervention With Children Experiencing Reading Difficulties

Many authorities in reading have emphasized that most children experiencing reading difficulties do not appear to require a qualitatively different reading program from other children, but do need more intensity of instruction, more immediate feedback to errors, and many more opportunities to practice reading and writing than do normally achieving youngsters (Torgesen, 1998). They also need more scaffolding of instruction. Scaffolding involves providing a set of appropriate instructional cues that are matched to children's initial levels of competence, and that are gradually faded as children acquire more skill. Whereas good readers may require fairly minimal scaffolding of instruction (e.g., pointing to a word that a child has read incorrectly while reading in context), struggling readers often need much more scaffolding (e.g., not only pointing to a word that has been read incorrectly, but also providing cues as to how to decode it, such as helping the child break the word into parts or drawing the child's attention to a particular pattern of letters).

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Overall, this kind of instruction requires more small-group and individual attention, and more tailoring of instruction to suit individual children's needs, than does instruction with other children. To be effective in teaching youngsters who are experiencing reading difficulties, teachers must have a knowledge base about the nature of early reading problems and how to address them. Timely intervention is extremely important in preventing long-term reading failure (Torgesen, 1998; Torgesen, Wagner & Rashotte, 1997). Ongoing assessment that determines which children require special attention, and in which areas, is essential for prompt intervention.

Regular classroom teachers are responsible for teaching all of the children in their classes, and **a range of instructional interventions must be available to children as part of the general education system** (Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998, 1999). However, classroom teachers also must have support and adequate resources in order to teach all children effectively. Children enter school with greatly varying levels of language and literacy. **To address all of the individual differences in a classroom, teachers need reasonable class sizes, adequate time for reading instruction and to prepare lessons and materials, adequate access to books and other materials, ongoing professional development opportunities, and high-quality preservice training.**

Also, **classroom teachers must have access to specialists.** In addition to the specialists discussed in previous subsections, other specialists may be extremely helpful to classroom teachers. For example, **special educators** have extensive knowledge about a variety of disabilities that may affect reading acquisition, such as learning disabilities, hearing impairment and mental retardation. They can provide information about instructional activities (e.g., activities for teaching word decoding and spelling) that frequently benefit children with reading difficulties in general, not only those with diagnosed disabilities. Special educators have knowledge about approaches for addressing problems that may co-occur with reading difficulties in some children, such as behavioral or attentional problems. **Speech and language pathologists** are valuable resources for information about typical language development, about normal variations in language (e.g., dialects), and about how to assess and develop a wide range of oral-language competencies.

At early grade levels, the main function of specialists is to provide consultation and collaboration services; for example, specialists may provide classroom teachers with suggestions for helping a youngster who is struggling with a particular skill or may demonstrate a lesson for teaching a particular reading-related competency. Effective collaboration requires

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*Effective collaboration requires adequate allocation of time in the schedules of both classroom teachers and specialists.*

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adequate allocation of time in the schedules of both classroom teachers and specialists. Various intervention strategies that have been tried with a particular struggling reader should be well documented.

Specialists often will work directly with children in the early grades. For example, specially trained teachers may work with struggling readers through special interventions such as reading recovery (Clay, 1985) or multisensory structured-language programs such as the Orton-Gillingham approach. Speech and language pathologists and special educators sometimes may work in the regular classroom, even with some children who have not been officially classified as eligible for special education, through coordinated service systems and the “permissive use of funds” (Connecticut State Board of Education, 1999). In all of these efforts with struggling readers, acceleration of learning is critical in order to catch children up to grade expectations.

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Poor readers who do not respond to interventions in the early grades should be considered for special education services. However, the number of poor readers who require special education could be greatly reduced with effective classroom reading instruction, ongoing assessment and timely intervention within general education.

The following are examples of intervention strategies to consider for children who are experiencing difficulties in beginning reading (adapted from Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998, 1999a):

1. explicit small-group phonemic-awareness instruction
2. explicit small-group or individual multisensory code-based instruction
3. explicit synthetic phonics instruction (part-to-whole)
4. daily oral reading practice with decodable texts and rich, interesting texts for independent reading
5. interesting, authentic texts at an appropriate level of difficulty
6. explicit small-group or individualized instruction in active reading and comprehension strategies
7. vocabulary building
8. daily opportunities to write, emphasizing both basic skills and higher-order thinking and deriving meaning from the text

As noted earlier, these strategies do not differ qualitatively from the instructional strategies that benefit all children; rather, they primarily involve greater intensity of instruction, greater tailoring of instruction to meet individual children’s needs and more opportunities for practice.



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## **Conclusion**

Section I of this report has discussed the kinds of competencies that are necessary to proficient reading and to learning to read. It has emphasized the importance of high-quality beginning reading instruction and the need for a comprehensive curriculum in reading, as well as outlining the basic components of this kind of curriculum. Section II of the report describes in more detail the competencies important to reading success for children in Grades K-3; different kinds of assessment that are useful in planning instruction to help children attain these competencies, with specific indicators for teacher intervention; and the skills and knowledge that primary-level teachers need in order to teach reading effectively.

