

# Older Struggling Readers: What Works?

## The BIG Picture

Many middle and high schools report large numbers of students who are reading 3, 4, and 5 grade levels below their expected level. It is naive to think that these extreme deficits in basic skills will be remediated in a traditional core English class, silent reading or via content area reading. My “read” of the evidence indicates that there are NO QUICK FIXES but it is indeed possible to significantly boost the literacy of struggling readers in middle school, high school, and beyond IF we allocate the time, training, and resources required to do the job... it is NEVER too late, only more difficult with older students for whom the benefits of literacy are not yet a reality. The research evidence and common sense indicate there are a few essential conditions that we must directly address to successfully impact problems associated with older struggling readers. Key variables include:

- 1) **TIME** - additional instructional time must be carved out of the day, this can take all kinds of forms (e.g. a scheduled elective, a core reading class, X-age tutoring in the learning center, summer school, after school, etc.). Most secondary schools w/significant reading problems have added a scheduled reading class as a “required elective” for students below a certain level.
- ✓ **Intensive Instruction** - 1 to 1 tutoring being the most intensive we know of, small homogeneous groups are next best; tutoring can be X-age, peer, paraeducators, volunteers as long as they are well trained & supported. Teaching is VERY interactive NOT work sheets!
- ✓ **Curriculum that Works!** - curriculum counts! there is no magic bullet but teachers need access to tools that work & support/training in their use, materials need to be research based and validated if possible... to work with older struggling readers.
- ✓ **Practice** - HUGE amounts of partner, group, silent, and home reading of instructional and independent level books. There are no shortcuts - no quick fixes!!
- ✓ **Student Self Advocacy** - adolescents must be stake holders in their self-improvement. I have found that if teachers give a good “sales pitch” and can deliver the goods that is half the battle, another key aspect is to have students chart their own progress daily and/or weekly - this kind of feedback is very motivating. It is also helpful to have students set their own goals... Students must be clear, we can’t “do this to them” - only “with them”!!

## Older Students with Serious Reading Difficulties

1.) **Corrective Reading** - SRA, Gary Johnson & Zig Engleman. (800) 662-5958, in No. Ca - Gary Parsons, (707) 575 - 7390.

This is a total package program, based on direct instruction, it has scripted lesson plans, clear sequences, appropriate text/stories, built in regular assessment. It is not “pretty” or “creative” but it does WORK! *Corrective Reading* has a solid research base for adolescents (gr. 4 & up) who have not learned how to read well. No Ca. consultant, Sue Coleman (707) 538 - 4877, provides expert training and classroom coaching with CR.

2.) **Language!** - Jane Fell Green, Sopris West, ( www.sopriswest.com, 800) 547-6747

A complete research based reading program designed for students grades 5 and up who are significantly behind in reading. Rooted in Slingerland multi-sensory instruction and applied linguistics, this program has everything you would need from explicit instructions, decodable text, language development, etc. Very thorough and quite impressive, recent studies with adolescents document the power of Language!, a 4 day training program is recommended to master the intricacies of effectively teaching the program.

3) **Wilson Reading System** - Barbara Wilson, (508) 865 - 5699, www.Wilsonlanguage.com

Another complete package, taking students from sounds to text, very systematic and explicit in design, excellent training available as well. Based on Orton-Gillingham multi-sensory teaching methods, good data to support its use - including college age students. Very popular on the East Coast, Barbara Wilson is a former speech and language specialist who has pulled together a comprehensive remedial reading program for student struggling

language specialist who has pulled together a comprehensive remedial reading program for student struggling readers.

**4.) Auditory Discrimination in Depth ( LIPS Program)** - Lindamood-Bell, (800) 233-1819, Available from Pro Ed in Austin TX. (512) 451-3246.

ADD was created over 20 years ago by Pat & Charles Lindamood, was the first truly linguistic reading program to emphasize phonemic awareness, has solid evaluation data to support its effectiveness. As with all of the above programs, training in how to use ADD is critical to realize the full benefit.

**5.) Boys Town Reading Program** - Mary Curtis & Anne Marie Longo - (402) 498 - 1075, email [curtism@boystown.org](mailto:curtism@boystown.org)

Designed and validated for adolescents with reading difficulties the Boys Town Reading Program is based on Jean Chall's stages of reading development. The program has four courses that take about 16 weeks each if taught 5 days per week in 45-60 min sessions. The courses match reading levels as each student is assessed and placed at their level of instructional need. Norm referenced and curriculum based measures document significant gains, average gains for 36 weeks is more than two grade levels.

**6.) REWARDS** - Sopris West, [www.sopriswest.com](http://www.sopriswest.com), (800) 547-6747 Anita Archer & Mary Gleason's polysyllabic word reading curriculum that directly teaches students reading at 3rd- 5th grade level a generalizable strategy to successfully tackle big words, excellent research support - especially with struggling readers. Local evidence suggests 2-3 years growth in word reading!! This is a very "parsimonious" program. REWARDS PLUS - is a brand new (2003) extension program by the same authors. The program uses middle school social studies passages and provides excellent instruction and practice in: advanced decoding, vocabulary meanings, comprehension strategies, and summary writing - it is very cool!

**7.) SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, & Sight Words)** - Developmental Studies Center - (510) 533-0213. Another excellent resource by Dr. John Shefelbine - excellent for gr. 3-5 in general ed. to systematically teach polysyllabic word reading and for older students at any age who need the skills.

**8.) Read Naturally** - (800) 788-4085, [readnat@aol.com](mailto:readnat@aol.com) , [www.readnaturally.com](http://www.readnaturally.com)  
Designed and validated by long time Title One teacher and reading specialist Candyce Ihnot, Read Naturally is a fluency development program that is garnering rave reviews across the country. It uses 3 research based strategies to build fluency: teacher modeling, repeated readings, progress monitoring in a simple yet effective format that kids love. Sold by the unit from .8 to 7.0 grade/reading levels each with pre-recorded tapes to go with the reading selections. Since this is a practice - not a teaching program, it can be easily run by a paraeducator...and kids love the reading selections... Read Naturally is very nifty

**9.) Soar to Success - Houghton- Mifflin** - (888-892-2377) [www.eduplace.com/rdg/soar/](http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/soar/)  
Soar to Success is based upon two strong aspects of successful reading intervention: reading books at your level, and using cognitive strategies of good readers - in this case, Reciprocal Teaching (summarize, predict, clarify, question). Soar is for students in grades 3-8 who are behind in reading - a very strong program BUT does not include decoding, so many students will need a program like REWARDS to supplement Soar - to provide the comprehensive intervention they need. Soar is based on original research conducted in Ca. by Irene Boschken with assistance from J. David Cooper of Ball State.

**10.) High Point** - Hampton Brown - [www.hampton-brown.com](http://www.hampton-brown.com) 800-333-3510  
One of the 5 approved gr. 4-8 intervention programs for California - and is the only one aligned with the ELD standards and approved for ELLs . It is very new, so the field testing and actual efficacy data is quite limited, but initial reactions have been very positive, especially for ELLs with serious literacy needs.

**11.) Fast Track** - Wright Group - [www.wrightgroup.com](http://www.wrightgroup.com) - 800-523-2371  
Another of the 5 approved CA interventions. Like High Point, limited field testing, but initial reactions are very positive. Time and more research will tell!!

**12.) Teacher Developed Programs** (see The Reading Teacher, vol. 49, no. 5 2 (1996) *A Case Study of a Middle School Reading Disability*, Morris, et al. or Educational Leadership, Ma. 1998, *A Second Chance to Learn to Read*, Showers, Joyce, et al. A teacher can put together an effective remedial reading program for adolescents who are seriously behind IF they have the time, background, support and materials to do so... These programs will end up looking much like *Corrective Reading/Language/ Wilson/ ADD* in terms of essential content (e.g. reading at the students instructional level, sequential text/word/ letter/sound work, linking writing to spelling/reading, on-going assessment) but will be, perhaps, more creative and attuned to the individual student... **either way it is the RESULTS that count!!**

## **Technology Based Reading Related Programs**

**Note:** Most of these programs have scant evidence to support their use, some have a degree of pre test/post test evaluation but not well controlled research. None the less, computer based support for improving literacy does hold out much promise and another resource worth providing to students with reading difficulties as a supplement to excellent teacher directed instruction and independent reading. KF

### **Matching Books to Students - "Shoe Store Technology"**

#### **1.) Accelerated Reader/Advantage Learning Systems - 800 890 -1472, [www.advdlearn.com](http://www.advdlearn.com)**

Accelerated reader is a nifty reading monitoring & motivation system. Kids read books off line and take simple, but reliable, on line reading tests to validate they got the basics of the story. All data is charted and tracked for the teacher and kids. STAR uses a cloze or maze test to ascertain reading levels, not as valid as oral reading - but as good as can be done on a computer & many report they are quite accurate. Thousands of titles are leveled by readability helping teachers pin point instructional and independent reading levels. A useful tool, but NOT an instructional program. (Math is their new product...)

#### **2.) Reading Counts/Scholastic Reading Inventory - Scholastic - (800) 724-6527, [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)**

Reading Counts offers easy-to-use, computerized quizzes on popular, high-quality books. Students select a book from more than 20,000 outstanding titles. After students read the book, they take a custom-generated quiz that verifies their reading comprehension and provides immediate feedback. After the quiz, they receive a point score in recognition of their reading accomplishments. A new product (actually an expansion of an old one bought out by Scholastic) designed to give AR a run for their money. Scholastic Reading Inventory is a nifty computer based assessment of comprehension that reports out in Lexile Levels. (SRI is the only "native" lexile based assessment)

#### **3. DRP Booklink - [www.tasaliteracy.com/drpboklink.htm](http://www.tasaliteracy.com/drpboklink.htm)**

Put out by the same folks who do the Degree of Reading Power Assessment (a fine assessment), the DRP has over 20,000 titles and provides easy access for teachers and others to match students to books they can actually read! The new version 7.0 is only \$99.00 and is a quick way to get up and running with this critical process of matching books to readers levels ("shoe store technology"!!).

#### **4. Lexile - Pathfinder - [www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com) 888-lexiles**

Lexile is a system for both assessing reading levels (see SRI) and text difficulty - it works for anything that is print based - including websites, newspapers, etc. Pathfinder is their product to match book lists by topic/author/etc. to lexile level. It is also inexpensive and is a quick way to get up and running with this process. The lexile framework is quite interesting - and well worth 20 min. of your time to go to [www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com) to learn about it - even if you don't use the program - it is replacing grade level as the standard for matching books to readers...

## **Instructional Tech Programs for Older Struggling Readers**

#### **1.) Lexia Reading SOS (Strategies for Older Students) - (800) 435 - 3942, [www.lexialearning.com](http://www.lexialearning.com)**

This software presents the 'activities' in game format; this appears to keep older students interested and engaged. In addition, each student's progress is monitored and they are presented with variations of the same exercise until they master the particular skill being taught. Developed in alignment with the Orton-Gillingham/Slingerland which places a focus on systematic and explicit phonics/decoding instruction. This is one of the best programs of its kind I have seen on the market, some initial evaluation research (Robert Ruth, SF Unified Schools) is very positive... well worth checking out a free demo disk - and excellent web site too - many links to national LD resources.

#### **2.) SkillsBank - (800) -725-8430, [www.skillsbank.com](http://www.skillsbank.com)**

Is a comprehensive, managed courseware package addressing the basic skills needed to reach high school equivalency. SkillsBank4 covers six subject areas -- language, reading, writing, basic mathematics, intermediate mathematics, and information skills. It is designed for the adolescent through adult learner. Skillsbank is one of the more affordable courseware packages available, and has impressive evaluation studies to support its use, I could find no controlled research and have my doubts about the "electronic worksheet" look of this program....

#### **3.) Read 180 - Scholastic - (800) 724-6527 [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)**

An eagerly awaited new multimedia program designed and validated by the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt University. The program involves interactive CD's with full motion video to provide schema/mental set, interactive text reading adjusted to students assessed reading level, spelling and word study, assessment and record keeping, paperback books leveled to match students, audio cassettes for each book with comprehension prompts, all set up in a 90 rotation in groups of 5 students (5 on the computer, 5 silently reading, 5 in teacher led instruction)... very nifty and well integrated.... Research conducted in Orange Co. Florida Middle

Schools found impressive gains (1.5 yrs on the Degrees of Reading Power on average) with serious disabled readers. Scholastic has added more elements to systematically teach sound/symbol correspondences and provide teachers and students with progress monitoring. This is the most integrated and impressive looking use of technology to support reading I have ever seen. Unlike Accelerated Reader, it is an instructional program as well as a management and assessment/motivation program. I look forward to more research to validate the potential impact of Read 180, but the initial data from the Florida studies are very exciting indeed.

4.) **Word Sort** - [www.HendersonEdSoft.com](http://www.HendersonEdSoft.com) - based on the well respected work of **Words Their Way** authors; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston - this share-ware provides a wide range of computer based word sorts sequenced by level of difficulty and time. The software is easy to use, teacher friendly, and totally appropriate for kids-adults since it is not at all "cutesy"... VERY cool software in my opinion (see Hanlon, Cantrell; *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Sept, 1999 for research support for this tool.

5.) **Words Their Way Interactive Resource CD ROM** - Prentice Hall, [www.prenhall.com/bear](http://www.prenhall.com/bear) This CD is an excellent resource for spelling/word study/phonics work based on the book, *Words Their Way* by Bear et al. (2000). It contains games, word sorts, word lists, Spanish instruction information, guidelines for assessing students to match level to activities, and much more. The authors also have a nice website full of resources you can check out at: [www.prenhall.com/bear](http://www.prenhall.com/bear) Word study/spelling is very powerful when correlated with your reading instruction program. These two word sorting CD's provide useful tools for teachers to engage all students at their instructional level. (note: this is **FREE** to individual teachers - download a copy today!!)

6.) **Inspiration 7.0** -(800) 877-4292 <http://www.inspiration.com/>  
The premier tool to develop ideas and organize thinking to support reading comprehension, pre-writing, outlining, etc. Inspiration 6 integrates an expanded range of visual learning and thinking techniques with the latest standards in graphics and Internet technology. Use it to brainstorm, organize thoughts and communicate ideas.. it is very cool - Also see the U of Oregon "Computer Based Study Strategies" site for tons of ideas/support/training using Inspiration, Co-Writer and more: <http://npip.com/CBSS/> or call (541) 346-2623... FREE training supported by the US Office of Special Education is currently available - check it out!

7.) **Read Naturally** - (800) 788-4085, [readnat@aol.com](mailto:readnat@aol.com) , [www.readnaturally.com](http://www.readnaturally.com) CD ROM version  
Designed and validated by long time Title One teacher and reading specialist Candyce Ihnot, Read Naturally is a fluency development program that is garnering rave reviews across the country. It uses 3 research based strategies to build fluency: teacher modeling, repeated readings, progress monitoring in a simple yet effective format that kids love. Sold by the unit from .8 to 7.0 grade/reading levels each with pre-recorded CD to go with the reading selections. Since this is a practice - not a teaching program, it can be easily run by a paraeducator...and kids love the reading selections... Read Naturally is very nifty

8.) **Start to Finish Readers** - Don Johnston - [www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com) 800 999-4660  
A wonderful program for older students using CD ROM and cassette technology for both a range of the classics and specially written high interest fiction for adolescents. The reading levels come in two sets -one set is gr. 2-3 and the next set cover 4-5. Ted Hasselbring (or Read 180 fame) and SCOE are engaged in doing a controlled study of STF readers during the 2003 school year to more fully evaluate the impact of this program - so far the results are very encouraging - and the students love it!

### Afterward

Technology oriented resources are literally exploding. The above listing will be out of date immediately and is incomplete right now! I advise folks to be "skeptically open minded". While there is much to be optimistic about very little of the commercial software is even field tested or pre/post test evaluated in real school settings - let alone studied with proper controls. However, I find much to be hopeful about in terms of the uses of technology to support literacy development in diverse learners. It is a "natural" for many reason; kids tend to like it, ease of differentiation to meet individual needs, computers are patient, etc. There are good programs available currently and many more are in production... just keep those "show me the evidence" glasses on! KF

## **Content Area Literacy : Reading & Writing**

### **1) Skills for School Success - Curriculum Associates 800 225-0248**

This is a fabulous set of modules pitched at secondary students developed by noted author researchers, Drs. Anita Archer and Mary Gleason. The modules include: text book reading, learning from lectures/presentations, school organization-time mgt. skills, and more. Very powerful and teacher/student friendly.

**2) What's Happening?** (831) 426-6532, [www.whpubs.com](http://www.whpubs.com)

A terrific resource of monthly articles on topics related to: California, USA, and the World. Using very topical subjects, the author re-writes the articles to be short-student friendly - and packed with information. It also comes in three formats: 7-8 gr. level, 4-5 gr. level, and Spanish - to support differentiated instruction and matching student level to needs.

**3) McREL - Teaching Reading in the Content Areas: If not me then who?** [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

This fine collection of strategies by Billmeyer and Barton offer a "one stop shopping" package of excellent strategies for vocabulary, comprehension, etc. They also have out a new book on content literacy and Science.

**4) Kate Kinsella** - [katek@sfsu.org](mailto:katek@sfsu.org) (650) 462-1814

An incredibly gifted teacher, author, thinker, and presenter -Kate's work in Content Literacy - reading, writing, strategic instruction and more is "state of the art". Kate has a very useful book on Content Area Reading put out by Globe Fearon.

**5) Ed Ellis** - [www.graphicorganizers.com](http://www.graphicorganizers.com) - 205 339-3704

Ed is a graduate of the U of Kansas and is one of the main researchers behind their very successful SIM model for adolescents with learning challenges. Ed's website has a rich array of graphic or cognitive organizers and related tools to help content area teachers accommodate student diversity while keeping the standards robust - Ed calls his work - "watering UP the curriculum"! They offer excellent training, CD ROM,s books, etc. - check it out!

**6) SIM - Strategies Intervention Model at U of Kansas** - [www.ku-crl.org](http://www.ku-crl.org) 785 864-4780

SIM is lead by Drs. Don Deshler and Jean Schumaker and is one of the longest running research centers dedicated to solving the problems of older struggling students. They have developed and validated an array of content area teaching strategies, content enhancements, lesson-unit organizers, and more... have a look!

**7) Project CRISS** - [www.projectcriss.com](http://www.projectcriss.com) - 406 758-6440

One of the very fist projects dedicated to bringing research based strategies to content area teachers. CRISS "Creating Independence Through Student-Owned Strategies) is a solid approach to providing specific vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies to 7-12 teachers. Their website is well worth a visit!

**Professional Books & Resources for Teachers:**

Allen, J. (1999). *Words, Words, Words, Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12*, York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers  
- An excellent description of practical vocabulary strategies for older students.

Beck, Isabel L., McKeown, M.G. and Kucan, Linda (2002). *Bringing Words to Life*, New York, London: The Guilford Press.

- One of the very best books on teaching vocabulary, loads of practical research validated strategies for pre-teaching critical vocabulary - very important for ALL struggling students, especially ELLs.

Blachowicz, C. and Ogle, D. (2001). *Reading Comprehension, Strategies for Independent Learners*, New York, London: Guilford Press

- A fine scholarly work on practical strategies for teachers to use in improving reading comprehension.

Billmeyer, R. Ph.D. and Barton, M. L. M.Ed. (1998). *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas, If not me, then who?*, Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory).

- One of the best sets of Content Reading Strategies available, see [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org) for more, they also have follow up book for content literacy strategies in Science.

Consortium On Reading Excellence (CORE), (1999). *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measusres*, Novato, CA:

- An excellent compendium of curriculum referenced assessments for students in grades K-8 or older if reading at K-8 levels. Assessments include phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some of the assessments are in Spanish as well.

Curtis, M.E. and Longo, A.M. (1999). *When Adolescents Can't Read, Methods and Materials that Work*, Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

- A good description of a validated approach to teaching older students to read... based on their mentor, Dr. Jeanne Chall's stage theory of reading and successfully implemented at Boy's Town USA.

Harvey, S. and Goudvis, A. (2000), *Comprehension Strategies that Work*, York, Maine: Stenhouse.

- An excellent overview of comprehension strategies that are effective with students in grades 4-12.

Lederer, R. (1990), *The Play of Words*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore. Pocket Books

- A fun and useful book to introduce students to idioms & word play of all sorts, very appropriate for older students.... See his website too: <http://pw1.netcom.com/~rlederer/>

Marzano, Robert J., Norford J.S., Paynter, D.E., Pickering, D.J. and Gaddy, Barbara B. (2001). *A Handbook for*

Classroom Instruction that Works, Alexandria, VA: (ASCD).

- One of the best summaries of “what works” in terms of instructional strategies in K-12 teaching, this gets very specific and is not just a “theory book”, well worth a look.

Schmoker, M. (1999). Results The Key to Continuous School Improvement, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

- A “bible” of school reform/improvement – clarifies in very simple terms the power of having grade level/dept teams: set clear goals, collect student performance data/work, analyze/plan/teach/revise based on student results.

Strategic Teaching and Learning, Standards-Based Instruction to Promote Content Literacy in Grades Four Through Twelve, Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

- A wonderful book of “content literacy” strategies for reading, writing, and vocabulary in grades 4-12. Highly recommended.