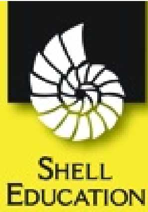

The Reading Intervention Toolkit

Laura Robb

Foreword by
Mary Howard

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Shell Education

5301 Oceanus Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649-1030
http://www.tcmpub.com/teachers

ISBN 978-1-4258-1513-4

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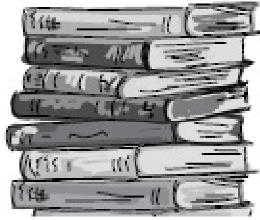

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Chapter 1

Setting the Stage for Reading Interventions

Responsive Teaching

Responsive teachers know what each student in a class does well and when a student requires extra support because they watch, listen, and have short but meaningful conversations with their students. Teachers who respond to students' needs intervene with scaffolds and guided practice to help struggling students with tasks, and then they gradually move those students to independence.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who identified the zone of proximal development, also called students' learning zone, recognized the need for responsive teaching and scaffolding to help students become independent (1978). There are students who can master a strategy that they can't complete independently when they have the support of an adult or peer expert. For example, Mara, a fifth-grader, struggles with using dialogue to infer personality traits. Her teacher, Ms. Keller, watches and recognizes that Mara can master this type of inferring with teacher modeling and time to practice. Ms. Keller schedules a series of five-minute conferences, one each day, while other students read or write independently. During two of the scaffolding conferences, Ms. Keller thinks aloud and discusses the inferring process with Mara and watches Mara practice. At the third meeting, Ms. Keller decides to turn over part of the responsibility for inferring personality traits to Mara. By the fifth conference, Ms. Keller has moved Mara to independence with this reading skill. To ensure that Mara maintains independence, Ms. Keller partners Mara with Tanisha, and the pair work together until the teacher, by observing the pair's discussions and by reading Mara's notebook entries, feels Mara will be successful on her own.

Responsive teaching practices also consider students' culture. This intervention illustrates that a responsive teacher is a careful observer of students, watching them work when students practice independently, with a partner, or in a small group. The goal always is to meet individual needs and help each child improve his or her reading (Allington 2011; Owocki and Goodman 2002; Robb 2010; Routman 2014).

Research indicates that when teachers understand students' cultures, students become more engaged and motivated in their learning, and they progress and build trusting relationships with their teachers (Gay 2000; Hawkins 2012; Zubrzycki 2012).

According to Douglas Magrath (2016), culture is an integral part of language and language patterns; the meanings of words that name the same item and concepts in different languages have connotations that differ. For example, Magrath explains that American culture often considers time a concept that is future-oriented, while Hispanic culture often considers time as the present moment.

Culturally responsive teachers communicate frequently with students to understand

their needs and frustrations and also to encourage students to communicate with each other (Delpit 2006; Gay 2000). Continual communication builds trust and shows students that their culture and individual learning needs are valued.

When teachers respond to the cultural and literacy diversity of their students, they meet students where they are and adjust tasks so students can succeed. For example, a district requires seventh-grade students to read a grade-level anthology, but there are several students reading three to four years below grade level. Here are some things teachers can do:

- Use the anthology selection to think aloud and model applying a skill or strategy (Hoyt 2013a and 2013b; Fountas and Pinnell 2013; Robb 2010 and 2013).
- Ask students to apply grade-level skills to texts at their own instructional reading level (Allington 2011; Bomer 2011; Routman 2014).
- Encourage independent reading of self-selected books. The more students read, the faster the rate of progress (Allington 2009; Allington and McGill-Franzen 2003; Krashen 2004; Miller 2009 and 2013; Robb 2013).

In order to know the types of reading interventions required for each student, responsive teachers reflect on the importance of four teaching practices and weave them into daily literacy lessons.

1. **The teacher models and thinks aloud.** Modeling and thinking aloud are two strategies that enable the teacher to help students learn how to apply a strategy or solve a problem (Burke 2010; Howard 2009; Keene 2008; Robb 2010 and 2014; Routman 2014; Wilhelm 2013). In a 10- to 15-minute mini-lesson, a type of explicit instruction developed by Donald Graves (1983) and popularized by Lucy Calkins (1994), the teacher can show the entire class, small groups, or individuals how strategies work. During the mini-lesson, the teacher can also scaffold a process such as identifying themes by explaining how this task can be organized into small steps.

   While modeling, teachers make their thinking visible to students and build students' mental model of a process. For example, when teaching students to make a logical prediction about what a character will decide, students first need to mentally review everything they learned about the character, including any decisions the character made. Then, students can use that information to make a logical prediction because it is based on evidence from the text.

2. **The teacher provides time to practice.** Students improve when they have time to practice (Howard 2009; Robb 2010; Routman 2014; Wilhelm 2013). Practice can be with a short text at a student's instructional reading level or with a passage or a few pages from a student's instructional reading book. The teacher can monitor and assess a student's application of a strategy from the student's writing about the reading or while watching the student's process during a conference (Allison 2009; Graham and Hebert 2010; Robb 2010). If the student's writing reveals an inability to cite text evidence to support an inference or to compare/contrast, then the teacher responds by planning an intervention.

3. **The teacher makes learning social and interactive.** Research suggests that engagement with tasks and motivation to learn increase when teachers shift the focus to student-centered learning. A student-centered approach uses methods such as collaboration through paired and small-group discussions and inquiry to solve problems, interpret texts, and actively engage in meaningful reading, writing, and speaking (Adler and Rougle 2005; Keene 2008; Robb 2010; Routman 2014; Wilhelm 2002).

   Teachers who use student-centered learning methods have multiple opportunities to be responsive to students who arrive at school with a variety of cultural backgrounds as well as a wide range of literacy experience and prior knowledge (Delpit 2006; Gay 2000; Tomlinson 2014; Smith and Wilhelm 2007; Wormeli 2007).

4. **The teacher plans and targets interventions to meet students' needs.** The goal of all intervention in grades 4 to 8 is to help students comprehend, interpret, and analyze reading materials, as well as improve their motivation to read, write, think, and discuss. Targeted interventions are focused lessons designed for students who need extra support in reading and writing.

The individualized focus of targeted interventions can make a difference in the progress of readers far below grade level because scaffolding and reteaching can move students to independence with a task (Adler and Rougle 2005; Allington 2011; Buffum, Mattos, and Weber 2009 and 2010; Duke and Pearson 2002; Howard 2009). It's important to view interventions through a positive lens and to see students who struggle or "don't get it" as capable of learning and making progress when you find ways to meet their needs.

The following are some ways that teachers can provide interventions for students:

- ➢ Pre-teach explicit vocabulary, such as three to four challenging words, prior to reading a text. In addition, you can teach word roots, prefixes, and suffixes so students have the tools for determining word meanings.
- ➢ Teach explicit comprehension strategy lessons that show students how to identify themes, big ideas, point of view, literary elements, and informational text structures, and how to infer and link these to themes, big ideas, and inferences about characters, topics, and people.
- ➢ Conduct extended discussions of text meaning that start with retellings to check basic comprehension and move to higher-order thinking, such as comparing and contrasting characters, analyzing the role of the setting, determining cause and effect, and identifying and analyzing multiple themes.
- ➢ Emphasize the importance of text evidence to support interpretations. This can be difficult for students who often resist returning to the text to nail evidence. Help students understand that their ideas are valid only when they support them with text details.
- ➢ Provide individual and small-group lessons, which offer opportunities to intervene by scaffolding a process. One-on-one and small-group interventions can occur while the rest of the class is reading and writing independently. Sitting side-by-side with a student or close to a small group can lower students' anxiety levels and

make the lesson more accessible (Atwell 1991; Fountas and Pinnell 2000; Howard 2009; Scanlon, Anderson, and Sweeney 2010).

Teacher TIP

There is no one, correct fix for building students' reading and writing capacity. I suggest that when you plan interventions, you target them on a specific need and find two to three strategies that might work. That way if one isn't supporting the students, you have another strategy at your fingertips.

If frequent assessments reveal that scaffolds aren't improving students' reading skill(s), you can consider reteaching using materials that differ from the original lesson and scaffold practice.

Roadblocks to Responsive Teaching

Many teachers are required to deliver content from a grade-level anthology or novel to every student. To meet this requirement for students reading two or more years below grade level, teachers often read the text aloud to the below-grade-level group and have students follow along in the text, while the rest of the class reads the anthology independently. However, teachers soon realize that students don't pass the grade-level unit tests because they can't read the material.

This kind of accommodation doesn't improve reading because the teacher is reading, not the students, and for students to improve, they need to read (Allington 2009 and 2011; Allison 2009; Ford and Opitz 2015; Robb 2013; Routman 2014).

Two myths surround this type of teaching:

- **Myth 1:** Exposing students to grade-level texts even though they can't read them will support their ability to pass state reading exams. Learning information can provide the background knowledge needed to comprehend grade-level materials.

Reality: Reading grade-level texts to students to hear the information does not improve students' reading skills or their ability to comprehend texts far above their instructional reading levels. Background knowledge is one prerequisite for comprehending grade-level texts, but it is not enough when students lack vocabulary and independent reading experiences. This strategy is not a ticket to passing state tests.

- **Myth 2:** Having students follow along in the text while the teacher reads aloud will build their vocabulary and reading skill.

Reality: There is no guarantee that students are following along when the teacher reads aloud. If the vocabulary and syntax are too difficult, students quickly figure out what to do to look as if they are following along. Moreover, following a text is not a form of instruction, and it won't move students forward.

Backward Slide

Although often done with good intentions, teachers who exclusively read aloud to

students who can't read and comprehend grade-level texts or have students primarily listen to audio of the texts often contribute to students' backward slide. Similar to Richard Allington's "summer slide" (2009), backward slide (and summer slide) occurs when students aren't reading. Therefore, one of the primary goals of intervention is to have students read, read, and read to build vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge, and the stamina to move forward.

Teacher TIP

Reading stamina is the ability to concentrate and read a text for 20 minutes or more. When students lack stamina, teachers can build it by having students settle down and read for 10 minutes until you observe they have met this goal. Then, gradually increase the amount of silent reading time until students can concentrate on reading for at least 20 minutes.

Class Size and Time to Teach

Teachers who have a wide range of instructional reading levels in their classrooms need to know and respond to what their students can and can't do on a daily basis and intervene quickly to clear up small confusions before they become large obstacles. This can happen when teachers have longer class periods and smaller classes (Chingo and Grover 2011).

Being a responsive teacher can become a challenging task when you have classes of 30 to 40 students reading at six to eight different instructional levels. Such a wide range of reading abilities is indicative of the heterogeneous groupings in many schools. Class size and the range of instructional student levels directly affect a teacher's ability to respond to students' needs with planned interventions. Chingo and Grover cite studies that show that reducing classes with 35 to 40 students to class sizes of 20 to 24 increased students' achievement over time (2011). Smaller numbers allow teachers to keep abreast of students' progress and intervene to help every student move forward and improve their reading.

Defining Reading Skill Versus Strategy

Teachers and students frequently use the terms *skill* and *strategy* interchangeably. However, these terms differ, and explaining them will clarify why I use the term *strategy* throughout this book. Here's how Peter Afflerbach, P. David Pearson, and Scott G. Paris explain these terms (2008):

- ➢ A skill is a well-practiced strategy, such as inferring or identifying big ideas. The term *skill* means that learners have proficiency with a strategy and can use it automatically in all situations.
- ➢ A strategy builds reading comprehension and requires practice in different situations until the learner can apply the strategy effortlessly or with automaticity in diverse situations.

Most students in grades four to eight, especially those who require intervention, are at

the strategy level. Students can progress when they practice and learn from reading strategies that use entire books at their instructional levels and self-selected books for independent reading.

Using Extra Time for Reading Instruction

To accelerate achievement for developing or struggling readers and improve their vocabulary and reading strategy use, schools often provide an additional 30–40 minutes a day of reading instruction in small groups. However, the 30–40 minutes need to be divided between strategy practice and reading entire short and long texts. Why? When students practice strategies out of the context of meaningful texts, it is rare that they will transfer those strategies to other genres and learning situations (Allington 2011; Scanlon, Anderson, and Sweeney 2010).

A New Approach to Ensure Measurable Gains

In a school where I coach teachers, a small group of fourth-grade special education students used to receive an additional 40-minute class every day. Students completed phonemic awareness exercises, phonics worksheets, and comprehension cards. They did not read books, and the teacher did not read aloud to them. At the end of the first semester, no measurable progress had occurred.

The teacher agreed to pilot a different approach and to start the class with a 10-minute interactive read-aloud to build students' mental model of how to apply reading strategies and think about text. During the remaining time, students chose books to read and reread. Three days each week small groups of students read at their instructional level and discussed the books with their teacher. Twice a week, students read books at their independent reading level—95% to 100% accuracy and excellent or satisfactory comprehension (Fountas and Pinnell 2009). Then, students discussed these books with partners. The discussions centered on retelling, literary elements, or information learned in nonfiction. Students also used prompts that encouraged discussion. For homework, students reread instructional books and self-selected independent reading books. By the end of the second semester, based on informal reading inventories, students made one-half to one-year gains in instructional reading levels.

Prompts That Fostered Discussion

To further their reading work, the fourth-grade teacher typed and printed the discussion prompts that follow and had students tape them into their notebooks. The prompts can also be projected onto an interactive whiteboard or written on chart paper. When pairs or small groups discussed a book, they agreed on one or more prompts. Sometimes, the teacher asked students to choose a prompt they discussed, write it in their notebooks, and list key points they discussed. The teacher also emphasized the importance of including text evidence with their answers.

The following discussion questions and prompts apply to any book, and students from each of the three tiers will find some they can reflect on and discuss.

Questions and Prompts for Fiction

- ➢ Who is the protagonist (main character), and what is his or her problem?
- ➢ Discuss two important settings, and explain why you believe each is important.
- ➢ Use a decision a character made and a problem he or she solved to identify two to three personality traits.
- ➢ Show how a character changed by pointing out the change in his or her personality. Then, discuss the event, person, setting, or conflict that caused the change.
- ➢ Choose one minor character and explain how he or she affected the main character.
- ➢ Were there problems that characters couldn't solve? Identify one or two and explain why you think each one wasn't solved.
- ➢ How does the title relate to the story?
- ➢ Discuss, using text details, two points that the author made about family, friends, feelings, nature, or life experiences.
- ➢ Are there examples of literary techniques such as flashback, foreshadowing, or figurative language? Identify one example and explain how it connected to a theme, a conflict, or a problem.
- ➢ Identify two antagonistic forces and explain how each one worked against the protagonist (main character). Why were these important to the story?
- ➢ Did the author create different moods? Find a passage that reveals mood and point out the words, phrases, and actions that helped create that mood.

Questions and Prompts for Biography

- ➢ Why is this person famous or important? How is that significant for society?
- ➢ Discuss two personality traits that helped this person achieve his or her goal.
- ➢ Identify two obstacles the person overcame and explain how he or she accomplished this.
- ➢ What traits and beliefs did this person have that enabled him or her to realize his or her dream? Select two to three to discuss.
- ➢ Select one person and one event and show how each one influenced the person's choices and decisions.
- ➢ How did this person affect the lives of other people during his or her time?
- ➢ Does this person's ideas or inventions affect people today? Explain why or why not.

Questions and Prompts for Informational Texts

- ➢ Why did you choose this book?
- ➢ What new information did you learn?
- ➢ What questions did the book raise in your mind but not answer? What can you do to find the answers to your questions?

- ➢ What did you learn from photographs and captions? How did these text features support the information in the text?
- ➢ What information did you learn from charts and diagrams? How did those text features support the information in the text?
- ➢ How did this book change your thinking about this topic?
- ➢ Did the author weave opinions with facts? Give an example of this and explain why it was significant.

Responsive Teaching with Tiers 1, 2, and 3 Readers

In a regular classroom, there is a core instructional curriculum that all students experience—this is Tier 1 instruction. Responsive teachers adjust the core curriculum so that it is accessible to every student in their classrooms. An effective way to adjust curriculum and differentiate instruction is to develop reading units around a genre and/or theme. To do this, find books and materials in your classroom and school library that relate to the genre and/or theme and that each student can read, learn from, and discuss with peers. This way, you can improve students' application of reading strategies to different texts and build their reading stamina, the ability to concentrate on reading. You can read more about this type of differentiation in Chapter 2.

It's important to note that even proficient and advanced readers become dependent, developing readers when faced with a text that contains new information and challenging vocabulary. It's helpful to revisit the definition of (and learning needs common to) each tier of readers so you can more efficiently provide interventions and organize partners who can support one another. In addition, responsive teachers understand that the most effective interventions are timely, based on students' struggles with a task, and target a student's specific learning needs (Howard 2009; Owocki 2010). To pinpoint students' needs, teachers try to identify students' reading difficulties early in the year; they monitor students' progress throughout the year by observing them, listening to discussions, conferring, and using writing about reading to assess students' use of text evidence to support thinking.

Tier 1 Instruction

All students in your class receive Tier 1 instruction. Instruction includes whole-class and small-group lessons and instruction from the teacher that meets the needs of the diversity of reading and writing levels. By teaching small groups of students with common needs, you can provide reading instruction that meets students where they are, offers appropriate challenges, and helps them improve. Instead of practicing isolated skills, students who read below grade level should practice reading with motivating texts, as well as reading and discussing self-selected books during independent reading (Allington 2009; Howard 2009; Owocki 2010). Though a core curriculum defines Tier 1 instruction, responsive teachers are flexible and make adjustments that meet each student's learning needs. Educators agree that high-quality Tier 1 instruction can support about 80 percent of the student population, enabling them to show solid growth during the year (Howard 2009; Owocki 2010; NASDSE 2006).

Tier 2 Instruction

Students who require Tier 2 instruction are those who aren't making enough progress in the Tier 1 curriculum and who require additional intervention. Students reading one to two years below grade level can fall into this group. You can identify these students by systematically monitoring formative assessments and observational notes as students listen, follow directions, discuss texts, read, and write. It is helpful to administer an individual reading inventory to determine a student's instructional and independent reading levels. To move these students forward, classroom teachers can supplement the Tier 1 core curriculum with longer interventions and reteaching lessons, intensify instruction by working with pairs and individuals, and inch these students closer to becoming grade-level readers.

Tier 3 Instruction

Students reading three or more years below grade level benefit from instruction beyond the core curriculum because they are at a high risk for failure. In addition to the differentiated core curriculum, these students can improve their reading by having an additional 30 to 45 minutes of reading instruction three to five times a week. Finding time to meet with students at risk for failing a grade, as well as having the funds for reading specialists, is often a challenge for schools. Following, you can find two sample schedules for addressing the needs of the three tiers of students. Select or adapt the schedule that works best for you.