

# Series: Powerful Best Reading Practices for Struggling Readers

## Part 8: Creating Lifelong Reading Success

by Marie Carbo, EdD

The seven basic principles for designing highly effective reading programs are central to teaching children to read well and love reading. In addition to those basic principles, there is important data about reading that principals need to know, plus effective, practical, *research-based* reading strategies that do it all—improve reading ability fast and nurture a love of reading.

### Principle #1: It's Natural for Children to Enjoy Reading and to be Motivated to Read

Tell children a good story and they want to hear more and more. Read a good story and the same thing happens. It's natural for students to enjoy stories. How do principals tap into kids' natural love of stories? Encourage your teachers to show their enthusiasm, interest and delight when they read to children. Positive energy is contagious. Choose high-interest, engaging stories and books to read aloud. The simple act of reading aloud, something children enjoy, has always been one of the most powerful ways to interest children in reading (Trelease, 2006). More is better. Many of today's students are read to very little at home. The 15 minutes or so that primary teachers usually read to children daily is rarely enough. More time is needed. Remember that reading aloud to children helps to familiarize them with written language, models for them the sound and rhythms of good oral reading, and improves their concepts and vocabulary.

#### Recommendations

- Encourage primary teachers to

read to students at least twice daily for 10 minutes or more.

- Set an example by visiting classrooms and reading aloud to students. What principals model carries a powerful message. Show your enthusiasm for reading.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss their favorite books, characters and events.
- Allow students to self-select what they want to read as often as possible.

### Principle #2: Learning to Read Should Be Easy and Fun

When reading is easy and fun, students *want* to practice reading (Carbo, 2013a). Practice leads to greater fluency, improved comprehension, and an expanded vocabulary. But what about those youngsters who have been left behind, those who have fallen through the cracks? Research tells us that by second or third grade, most struggling readers just struggle harder and rarely catch up. When the process of learning to read becomes laborious and even embarrassing, then the chances are high that the child will dislike and avoid reading—exactly what we don't want to happen.

Our aim should be to help all children feel comfortable and relaxed when they're learning to read, to avoid creating *any* sense of failure and to provide the amount and kind of practice needed to move kids forward.

#### Recommendations

- Provide time for students to read with friends—including cross-age

or cross-classroom friends.

- Most struggling readers dread and are embarrassed to read aloud. Suggest that teachers have struggling readers practice passages *before* reading aloud. They can practice with a buddy or with a slightly slow tape recording of the passage (try free "Sample Talking Stories" at [www.nrsi.com](http://www.nrsi.com)).
- Help teachers and parent support groups to provide cozy reading areas with lots of high-interest books, soft furniture, rugs and pillows. Help children associate reading with pleasure.
- Schedule a time during your week when teachers can send children to read to you. Create a reading area in or near your office that is warm and friendly.

### Principle #3: Children Learn from Modeling

Just as young people learn language by imitation, they learn to value and enjoy reading by observing and responding to role models. Modeling good reading is a great way to make reading easy and fun *and* to teach children to read at the same time. There are many methods that can have a powerful effect on student achievement in short periods of time (Carbo, 2013b). These methods, which I call "modeling methods," are officially termed "assisted reading methods" in the reading literature. Methods were described in detail in Part #2 of this series.

#### Recommendations

- As time permits, read to groups or classes of students.
- Encourage teachers to read aloud to their students daily.

- Stress the use of modeling techniques for emerging or struggling readers. Have teachers point to phrases as they read from large charts, books or the chalkboard. For non-fluent readers, have teachers read a simple, high-interest short passage at a slightly slow pace a few times, and then have the children read that passage back. Then the teacher reads the next passage, and so on. This activity can be done for five minutes or so daily to improve word recognition and fluency. Another tip: It's easier for students to learn to read words that are in an interesting context, rather than words in isolation.
- Provide "talking stories" so that students can listen and follow along. (Try free sample "talking stories" at [www.nrsi.com](http://www.nrsi.com)).
- Struggling readers need to hear and see words repeatedly.
- Teach parents and guardians a variety of modeling strategies for increasing reading fluency and comprehension. (Part #2 in this series shows you how.)

#### **Principle #4: Matching Students' Reading Styles Increases Motivation and Achievement**

Often the reading style of the struggling reader has been mismatched. Knowing how to capitalize on students' individual reading styles (their learning style for reading) is a big step in minimizing failure. Here's some of what we know about struggling readers: Some are English learners; many are poor; others lack sufficient experience with words, letters and books; and some have perceptual problems. Regardless of these critical factors, as a group, many struggling readers are unmotivated due to

feelings of failure, and they often are global (holistic), hands-on learners. The good news is that when these students are taught with motivating, high-interest reading materials, modeling methods, and games, many of them learn at remarkable rates.

#### **Recommendations**

- When one method or strategy isn't working, teachers need to try another approach. Teachers need to know and apply many effective reading methods.
- Allow students with visual problems (moving letters, letters doubling) to try placing a colored overlay over a page of print (see [www.dyslexiacure.com](http://www.dyslexiacure.com)).
- Allow students many ways to report information (dioramas, dressing up as a character, creating book jackets, creating a game, and so on).
- For unmotivated students, provide high-interest short stories and use a variety of modeling methods, short reading assignments, and plenty of encouragement.
- Have teachers provide students with choices of reading partners, reading materials, and places to read—at least some of the time.

#### **Principle #5: Good Readers Spend Time Practicing Reading**

Low reading ability has a devastating effect on America, but especially the poor. To rise above poverty, a much larger percentage of our students will need to achieve at least a ninth-grade reading level, because the bar has been raised, requiring ever-higher reading levels for all but the most menial jobs. (About 80% of prison inmates read at a second- to third-grade level.) The ability to read has a dramatic impact on a young person's life.

Good readers spend a lot of time reading. They practice, practice, practice. Yet most American children spend very little time reading anything at all! Practice helps to improve reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary; practice also helps to raise test scores. Students are more likely to practice reading if they truly enjoy reading and if they enjoy the reading material. Forcing students to read is seldom the answer. Force usually decreases reading motivation.

#### **Recommendations**

- Encourage students to take books and stories home to read.
- Set aside specific, uninterrupted reading periods during the school day.
- Provide reading materials for a wide range of students' reading interests and reading levels.
- Have specially recorded reading materials available for those who are not yet independent readers. Make use of the free "talking stories" at [www.nrsi.com](http://www.nrsi.com).
- Sponsor book exchanges that allow students to trade books.
- De-emphasize workbooks. Some workbook exercises do help to prepare students for tests, but too many workbook pages turn students off to reading, making it less likely that they will read on their own, voluntarily—which, research tells us, is one of the strongest ways that students become good readers. *Students learn to read by reading.*

#### **Principle #6: Literacy-Rich Environments Increase Reading Motivation**

Classrooms that immerse students in print give a strong message that reading is important. Initially, easy materials can be used, such as big books, picture books, recorded

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*Instructional Leader* is published every other month by the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, 501 East 10<sup>th</sup> St, Austin, Texas 78701. Telephone: 512-478-5268 1-800-252-3621

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books, children's own stories, and books with predictable language and repetitive phrases.

It's *particularly* critical to accommodate the reading interests of older students. Many older struggling readers have long since become turned off to reading. They won't suddenly turn on unless reading becomes easy and fun for them. For these youngsters, provide lots of high-interest recorded short stories. Read exciting stories aloud to them often, and don't subject older struggling readers to long books that they find boring.

### Recommendations

- Have teachers identify students' reading interests through questionnaires and interviews. Provide reading materials based on those interests.
- Try free HI-LO "sample talking stories" at [www.nrsi.com](http://www.nrsi.com).
- Label objects and post written charts throughout the school.

Especially effective are charts announcing challenging riddles or puzzles with prizes for winners.

- Include many types of reading materials in classrooms, such as poetry, storybooks, children's stories, newspapers, magazines, recorded stories and books, reading games, and software.
- Be sure to have and use recorded short stories for older students. Follow-up games that practice reading skills are ideal for all age groups.
- Provide helpful reading information to parents, such as recommended book lists, suggestions for reading aloud to their child, and ways to create good reading environments at home.

### Principle #7: Stretch Students with High-Level Reading Materials

All recommendations thus far are designed to put children on the path to becoming good readers.

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## Lifelong Reading

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But for those who have already been left behind, these recommendations are not enough. Students need to be exposed to high-level reading materials or they will never be able to read or understand them. This teaching process needs to be done so that children are challenged but not defeated.

Two basic techniques for stretching students are included in the recommendations below. The first technique requires modeling and encouraging students' high-level thinking. Asking too little of struggling readers is a common error. The second technique involves the use of modeling and modeling methods with high-interest reading material (high-interest to student). I can't stress enough the power of these two approaches at any grade level.

### Recommendations

Include in every classroom challenging, high-interest reading materials recorded at a slow pace with a few minutes of text on one

CD track. Students listen and follow along a few times and then read back the text. (To learn the correct recording pace, practice with Power Reading stories at [www.nrsi.com](http://www.nrsi.com).)

- Suggest that teachers read aloud challenging materials often and ask thought-provoking questions.
- After a lesson, have teachers divide students into small groups, thus providing each student with a chance to think and respond to questions on the board.
- Have teachers practice how they will model high-level thinking by thinking aloud about characters and events in a story as they read the story aloud.
- Encourage teachers to have students design their own high-level questions.
- Demonstrate to parents simple questioning techniques that stimulate language and thinking.

After all of these principles and recommendations, what does the research tell us about good reading programs? According to the NAEP,

in good reading programs, students do large amounts of reading in and outside of school and they read a large variety of materials. Workbook activities are deemphasized, discussions of reading materials emphasize high-level thinking, reading and writing are connected, and literacy is supported in the home. These characteristics of good reading programs are given strong support by implementing the seven major principles in this article.

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