Series: Powerful Best Reading Practices for Struggling Readers
Part 3: A Three-Step Plan for Increasing Reading Achievement

by Marie Carbo, Ed.D.

The majority of students in the U.S. do not read well, and the ripple effect of that problem in determining our nation's place in the world has been devastating. Only *one-third* of our students in grades 4, 8, and 12 read at or above the proficient level, and reading for pleasure continues to decline (Bracey, 2006; Dillon, 2005; *The Nation's Report Card: Reading,* 2009, 2011). Let's translate those troubling statistics. Due to the low reading ability of our students, two-thirds of them are likely to have difficulty comprehending their science, social studies and math texts. Obviously, if students cannot read their textbooks with ease, it's more difficult for them to become proficient in those subjects.

Not surprisingly, when compared to students in other industrialized countries, American students now rank 14th in reading, 25th in math, and 17th in science. In fact, the U.S. has plummeted from No. 1 in high school graduations to 22nd, and less than half of our students now finish college (Blow, 2013).

A Three-Step Plan
To increase our students' reading levels quickly, we need to:
1. Accommodate students' reading style strengths,
2. Sharply increase effective reading practices, and
3. Greatly decrease ineffective reading practices.

Step 1. Accommodate Students' Reading Style Strengths
Why do some young people learn to read easily while others in the same reading program struggle? One reason is that our individual reading styles predispose us to learn easily with certain reading methods and materials. Each reading method and set of reading materials demands different strengths of the learner. If a student has the requisite strengths, then a match occurs—and he or she learns to read easily and enjoyably. If, however, there is a mismatch between the student and the approach, the instruction itself will hinder that youngster's ability to learn to read (Carbo, 2007; *Reading Styles Research*, 2009).

Reading Style of Struggling Readers and Young Children. Struggling readers and young children tend to be global, tactile/kinesthetic learners (Carbo, 2007; Dunn et al., 1995; Thies, 1999-2000). These youngsters benefit from high-interest reading materials, structured choices, hands-on skill work, opportunities for mobility and working in groups, and powerful modeling of texts (Carbo, 2013). (See Figure 1.)

How to Teach Strongly Global Students. To teach global learners well, *meaning* is the key. Global learners do well if they are deeply interested in what they are reading. Their reading programs should focus on words learned primarily in context, as well as challenging, high-interest stories, with specially paced, slightly slow recordings that enable them to read stories on or above their reading level (Carbo, 2007), and reading skills that focus on comprehension.

How to Teach Strongly Analytic Students. Analytic students, on the other hand, respond well to phonics (if they are also sufficiently auditory). The step-by-step nature of phonics appeals to analytics. Analytics tend to learn the way phonics is generally taught— with sequential, step-by-step lessons, predictable rules, clear directions, and ample practice. It's important to note that reading programs for analytic students also should include the global reading approaches listed above.

How to Accommodate Students' Perceptual Strengths. We all take in information through our different senses: auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic. About 20% of our students can recall what they hear, while 40% are more likely to recall what they see. Many need to write or use manipulative materials to recall facts easily, and some learn

Figure 1. Reading Style of the Struggling Reader

Highly Tactile	Needs Mobility
Highly Kinesthetic	Prefers Choices
Global	Needs Structure
Prefers Group Work	

Source: National Reading Styles Institute, 1998.

Figure 2. Identifying Modality Strengths

Auditory Learners:
- ☐ Detect differences in sounds among letters and words
- ☐ Recall what they hear
- ☐ Learn by listening and speaking

Visual Learners:
- ☐ Detect visual differences among letters and words
- ☐ Recall what they see
- ☐ Learn by observing

Tactile Learners:
- ☐ Detect differences in shapes and textures they touch
- ☐ Recall what they touch
- ☐ Learn by writing, tracing, playing games

Kinesthetic Learners:
- ☐ Detect differences in experiences
- ☐ Recall body movements, feelings, experiences
- ☐ Learn by performing and most kinds of physical activity

Source: National Reading Styles Institute, 1998.

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best with real-life activities, such as planning and running a book sale. An excellent technique for accommodating modality strengths is to provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned. (See Figure 2.)

Step 2. Increase Effective Reading Practices

The strategies listed in Figure 3 help to make learning to read easy, interesting, and enjoyable. When students enjoy reading and associate reading with fun, they're more likely to spend substantial time reading for pleasure (Carbo, 2013a). That's extremely important, because the cognitive abilities required to perform well in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary are developed and strengthened through large amounts of pleasure reading (Allington, 2001; Anderson, 1996), especially when students are in "the flow," when they are deeply engaged in what they are reading (Armstrong, 1998; Cziksentmihalyi, 1991).

Step 3. Decrease Ineffective Reading Practices

The reading practices in Figure 4 make learning to read unnecessarily difficult for students, and reduce reading for pleasure. Those practices include: an overuse of worksheets and skill sheets; boring reading materials; focusing on reading speed (i.e., words per minute) rather than comprehension; and constant drills to prepare students for end-of-year tests. As ineffective reading practices decrease, more precious time becomes available for teachers and students

Figure 3. Increase Effective Reading Practices

Accommodate both global and analytic reading styles.
Remember that most young students and struggling readers tend to be primarily global learners.

Do not emphasize phonics with strongly global students or those who are not sufficiently auditory.
When students struggle with phonics, consider using other methods. Fit the method to the child, not the child to the method.

Try colored overlays to minimize visual problems.
For students with visual dyslexia, letters can seem to swirl, reverse or slide off the page. Colored overlays can correct or reduce this problem. (See www.dyslexiacure.com and www.seeitright.com.)

Provide sufficient modeling of stories.
Modeling is a strong global strategy for both beginning and struggling readers who need to see and hear the words in a story being read. (See Carbo, 2013b.)

Figure 4. Decrease Ineffective Reading Practices

Do not overuse worksheets and skills sheets.
There is little to no research that supports their use.

Eliminate boring reading materials that don't interest students.
Ample evidence indicates that schools are not providing reading materials that most children want to read, especially in the higher grades (Worthy, Moorman, and Turner, 1999).

Do not emphasize reading speed.
Reading speed increases naturally when students read a great deal. The measurement of reading speed using "wpm" (words per minute) tends to *reduce* comprehension, and comprehension is the most important goal of reading.

Do not overemphasize skills teaching.
Few of the hundreds of skills and subskills being taught have been validated as being necessary for children to become good readers.

Do not overemphasize end-of-year reading tests.
The continual fear of failure, and the resulting high levels of stress, all have a negative effect on learning. Worst of all, stress reduces the ability to think and perform at high levels (Caine et al., 2005; Sprenger, 1999).

to enjoy reading, share their favorite stories, and read their favorite stories and books.

Conclusion

Clearly, our students can and should make much greater reading progress, regardless of such factors as socioeconomic status and ability to speak English. The effective reading practices in this article place *the student* at the center of all reading instruction. Those practices capitalize on each student's natural learning strengths and interests, minimize students' weaknesses, and reduce stress. They help educators reach through to the interests, intelligence, and learning capacity that our students do have. And, ultimately, they help us accomplish our two most important reading goals: to enable our students to read and comprehend at high levels, and to make the process of learning to read so easy and enjoyable that our students read for pleasure voluntarily and become lifelong readers.

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For information about Power Reading Online, the brain-compatible reading program used at I.S. 206 in the Bronx, and many of the schools listed in this article, as well as to work with Carbo recordings, visit www.nrsi.com.