

THE EXCHANGE

Volume 20, Issue 1
October/November, 2007

On Beyond Remediation: Renewing the Call for Content Area Literacy Instruction

by Cynthia Greenleaf, SRIG President



Inside this issue:

"If all of America's adolescents are to have a meaningful opportunity to master the more sophisticated skills that the present times demand, then the movement to improve adolescent literacy instruction must go beyond its current emphasis on helping struggling readers to catch up in reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension."

*Rafael Heller and Cynthia Greenleaf
Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas:
Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement*

This past spring, I had the pleasure of working with Rafael Heller, formerly of the Alliance for Excellent Education, to produce a monograph calling for a renewed focus on content area literacy instruction. The Alliance for Excellent Education has called on the help of literacy educators in the past few years to produce several reports, among them the influential *Reading Next, A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*. Along with professional organizations like the National Governors Association, the National School Boards Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, IRA, and NCTE, the Alliance has helped to bring the ongoing literacy learning needs of our nation's adolescents to the nation's atten-

tion. The federal Striving Readers Bill is evidence of tremendous progress in drawing attention and needed resources to adolescent literacy.

Rafael and I argue in this monograph that, given this extraordinary confluence of attention, effort, and political will, it would be a grave mistake to set our sights too low, aiming only to bring greater numbers of middle and high school students to a modest level of proficiency in reading and writing through intervention and remediation efforts. We hope this monograph will help to extend the focus of current reform initiatives centering on building adolescents' literacy skills, to developing the advanced literacy proficiencies that profoundly shape young people's opportunities in education and the

workplace.

As NAEP tests repeatedly tell us, a small fraction of our nation's students (3% at 8th grade and 5% at 12 grade) demonstrate "advanced" literacy skills such as the ability to draw inferences from academic texts, synthesize information from various sources, and follow complex directions. According to the Programme of International Student Assessment in reading, America's 15 year olds lag behind those of every other English speaking, highly industrialized country, and behind Japan and Korea as well.

While rank comparisons between industrialized nations raise the economic imperative of increasing the literacy capacities of American youth, the social and cultural impera-

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tives for our nation are just as compelling. We know that the stronger their literacy skills, the more likely adults are to hold full time jobs, vote in national elections, participate in community organizations, volunteer in their neighborhoods, and spend time helping their children with their homework. For all students to become competent in the kinds of skills needed to succeed in college or the workplace or to participate more fully in civic life, the nation must reach for high level literacy for all of its citizens.

Yet sadly, the majority of middle and high school students engage in very little sustained reading in school, and when they do it is mainly from brief, teacher-created handouts and, to a lesser degree, from textbooks. It is still the case that secondary school teachers encourage and require very little reading of primary sources or real-world materials. Most devote little if any class time to showing students, explicitly, what it means to be a good reader or writer in the given subject area. And most students engage in very little discussion of what they have read, how to write, or how to interpret, analyze, or otherwise respond to texts.

In the report, we claim that reading and writing are more than just basic skills that permit students to go on and study advanced subject matter; reading and writing are also the very stuff from which the academic content areas are made. In or-

der to demonstrate the important role content area teachers can play in adolescent literacy development, we describe some of the literacy demands and practices that are specific to various content areas. We also describe effective professional development practices that assist content area teachers to understand, articulate, and teach discipline-based literacies, demystifying the reading and writing that are part of their fields.

One cannot tackle the need for systemic content area instruction without acknowledging key impediments to its broader implementation. Some of the impediments that we discuss in this paper include the lack of content literacy standards in most state frameworks; the press to cover content across broad topic areas rather than selectively and in depth; the misalignment of high stakes assessments with content area literacy instruction; the lack of resources in schools and classrooms to address the needs of various readers and English learners; and the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in building adolescent literacy. To overcome these barriers, we end with some policy recommendations, advocating that:

- 1) the roles and responsibilities of content area teachers be defined clearly and consistently, making explicit that it is not those teachers' job to provide basic reading in-

struction;

- 2) members of every academic discipline participate in defining the literacy skills that are essential to their content area and which they should be responsible for teaching;
- 3) all secondary school teachers receive initial and ongoing professional development in teaching the reading and writing skills that are essential to their own content areas; and
- 4) school and district rules and regulations, education funding mechanisms, and state standards and accountability systems combine to give content area teachers positive incentives and appropriate tools with which to provide reading and writing instruction.

It is my hope that this report will contribute to the chorus of voices who have long called for content area literacy instruction, and to your work in schools to provide secondary literacy instruction and develop teacher capacity among your peers and colleagues. The report can be downloaded from the Alliance for Excellent Education website: www.all4ed.org

For policymakers, the challenge is no longer just to call attention to the nation's adolescent literacy crisis. Nor is it just to secure new resources to help middle and high school students catch up in reading, although the need for those resources remains critical. The challenge is also to connect the teaching of reading and writing to the rest of the secondary school improvement agenda, treating literacy instruction as a key part of the broader effort to ensure that all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life after high school.



Reading Resources from the Center on Instruction

by Patti Crotti, WestEd

Looking for an easily accessible resource which provides a collection of scientifically based research and information on K-12 instruction in reading?

The Center on Instruction provides an array of resources, research synthesis, and tools on K-12 instruction in reading, mathematics, science, special education, and English language learning. The center is one of five content centers serving as resources for the 16 regional U.S. Department of Education Comprehensive Centers.

Resources are available for viewing at <http://www.centeroninstruction.org>. Here are some recently posted resources to whet your appetite!

Teaching All Students to Read in Elementary School: A Guide for Principals

This document provides a 'quick start' guide for elementary school leaders. It includes studies of successful schools, critical elements of an effective reading program, and key tasks for principals as literacy leaders, and special considerations for reading instruction after third grade.

Improving Literacy Instruction in Middle and High Schools: A Guide for Principals

This document is intended for middle and high school principals. It outlines the critical elements of school-level literacy action planning, identifies three goals for secondary school leadership and provides elements of instruction required to meet these goals.

Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers: A Meta-Analysis with Implications for Practice [4-12]

This guide presents results of a meta-analysis conducted by the center and provides guidance for intervening with adolescent struggling readers, outlining major implications for practice.

Adolescent Literacy Resources: An Annotated Bibliography [4-12]

This document is intended as a companion piece to *Intervention for Adolescent Struggling Readers*. While the listing is not exhaustive, this document presents research summaries and policy documents that discuss current key research issues.

While these resources are available for viewing on the Center on Instruction website, please adhere to the center's Copyright © 2007 Center on Instruction at RMC Research Corporation.

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Book Review—*Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy: An Implementation Guide for School Leaders* by Judith L. Irvin, Julie Meltzer, and Melinda Dukes Mary Ann Liberati, SRIG President Elect

"Principals often ask us, "What does a literacy-rich school look like? How is it different from what is going on at our school?" It is difficult to develop a vision without having some sense of the goal. This entire book is about turning a vision into a reality creating a literacy-rich middle or high school that successfully develops the academic literacy habits and skills of all students."

Authors Judith Irvin, Julie Meltzer and Melinda Dukes have extensive experience working in school districts nationwide and share the core belief that a systemic focus on literacy as lever is vital to school improvement. Secondary schools have largely neglected literacy instruction and commonly students receive no systematic instruction in literacy beyond grade 5, in spite of the fact that the demands of text become increasingly difficult through the upper grades. With more than 8 million students reading below grade level and unprepared for 21st century skills, the state of adolescent literacy is on the national radar screen.

The Leadership Model for Improving Adolescent Literacy puts forward the authors' best thinking and experiences about how to synergistically lead a literacy initiative. Three goals at the heart of the model are:

1. student motivation, engagement, and achievement;
2. integrating literacy and learning across content areas and through the use of literacy interventions; and
3. sustaining literacy development by including the school environment, parents, the community, and the district.

There are five action steps of the model that provide roles and responsibilities for leaders.

They are:

1. implement a literacy action plan,
2. support teachers to improve instruction,
3. use data to make decisions,
4. build leadership capacity, and
5. allocate resources.

Judy Buchanan, Doug Buehl, Amy Correa, Agnes Crawford, Andres Henriquez, Carol Jeffers, Keith Lenz, Melvina Phillips, Barbara Scott Nelson, and James Spillane served on the advisory board to ensure content rigor, practicality, and viability for the book. Written in two parts, the first part focuses on the goals of the model and the second part focuses on the action steps. The text is conspicuously free of educational jargon and rhetoric, and is eminently readable, seeking clarity and congruence in its central premise which is to strategically improve adolescent learning and achievement through intentional literacy leadership.

As a former high school reading specialist/consultant I was impressed with tools embedded in the text that support institutional change and creating a culture of literacy in schools. Among my favorites was figure 3.1 Prototypes of Struggling Readers and Writers which describes five students with diverse abilities and needs and links to activities to support their learning. Another is figure 5.3 Action Plan Goals for School Policies, Structure, and Culture which graphically shows action plan samples from a middle school which focuses on developing a school culture in which teachers design and implement curriculum and instruction across content areas. Figure 7.2 Seven Data Sources about Students' Reading and Writing Performance gives insight

into using data insightfully to plan interventions and measure progress. Chapter 8 Build Leadership Capacity details the key roles for literacy team members, school administrators, curriculum coordinators, reading specialists, library/media specialists, ESL/Special education teachers, department chairs/team leaders, and content area teachers respectively. And lastly, figure 8.10 Responding to Teachers Who Resist Literacy Improvement Efforts addresses why teachers may be resistant and the key messages for teachers to hear.

Beyond the body of the text, the appendices include four vignettes, helpful tools, a glossary, and relevant resources for further learning. In addition, on the ASCD website is a study guide designed to enhance understanding of the book and offer ways in which the book can be used by literacy leadership or school improvement teams to forward their improvement efforts. Are you a school or district leader trying to reverse the cycle of failure? Do you believe that improving student literacy will lead to increased student achievement? Would you benefit from insights into how to be an effective manager and instructional leader with a focus on literacy? If you've answered yes to these questions, then this is a book you'll want to "check out."

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Conversations Worth Having

by Cynthia Greenleaf

I developed the following scenarios to spur conversation among different groups of educators with responsibility for adolescent literacy improvement. These scenarios have worked well as a vehicle for raising difficult policy issues and for sponsoring fruitful exchange across various roles in the system – from superintendent to building supervisor, from literacy coach to adoptions committee members. I invite you to try them out, as they fit your dilemmas and contexts, and let me know how the conversations go!

Discussion Scenarios

Scenario 1. Regime Change

A district superintendent sends a team of teachers and resource personnel to learn about a particular model of professional development, with a focus on reading across the curriculum. The team then implements the model, offering seminars for groups of middle school teachers and their principals. Within several months – and although test scores had been flat for years – students' end of grade scores increase in all of the participating schools. Encouraged by the superintendent, the rest of the district's middle schools join the initiative. Soon, each school boasts a designated instructional leader for literacy in each of the different content areas, and plans are being made to extend the model to the high schools. Just as things are looking up, however, the superintendent leaves the district for another position. Her replacement calls a halt to the literacy initiative and the professional development offerings, replacing them with a program of his own choosing.

How can we build capacity for long-term professional development in school districts with ever-changing administrative leadership?

How can we better align career incentives for administrators to support the continuity of good work, rather than disrupting sustained professional development for the sake of implementing bold new initiatives?

Scenario 2. Reformitis

A high school serving a migrant agricultural population is identified as underperforming, based on its reading scores. Using funds allocated to schools on the state watch list, the principal decides to

send cross-disciplinary teams of teachers to participate in a year-long professional development program focused on reading across the curriculum. Over the next few years, these teachers begin to share their new classroom practices with faculty members in all parts of the school, including all academic content areas and grade levels. Each year, test scores increase, particularly among targeted student populations, and the high school is removed from the underperforming schools list. However, this means that the school loses the funding it had used for professional development. The next year, the principal announces a new initiative: the school will form small learning communities. Teachers voice concern that their attention is being drawn away from the ongoing literacy work, and, that spring, test scores begin to decline.

How can we sustain professional development and growth in literacy across the curriculum over time, even as new reform initiatives arrive on the scene, offering new funding streams and potential benefits?

How can we ensure that new reform initiatives do not derail good work already underway?

Scenario 3. You Can't Get There From Here

A state department of education decrees that high schools defined as underperforming – which in this state tends to mean schools with high concentrations of poor and/or language minority students – will be subject to strict new mandates, with supplemental resources going to support specific, remedial teaching practices. In practice, this means that in those high schools, students scoring below the 25th percentile on state reading and math assessments are removed from academic and elective classes and placed into skills-based reading and math courses, where they spend as much as five of the school day's six hours. Meanwhile, even as the state announces these new rules it is completing an intensive, multi-year process of defining new academic content standards, linking them to state assessments and benchmarks, and creating a tough new high school exit exam, which is meant to ensure that all students graduate with academic proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics.

How can we design professional development to help teachers accelerate students' literacy development in the academic content areas rather than withdrawing students from academic learning opportunities to remediate low literacy skills?

How can we better align literacy policies, instructional interventions, and testing to the ambitious academic goals and high standards we hope to achieve for all students?

Scenario 4. Ensuring Infidelity

A cross-disciplinary team of high school teachers attends a professional development institute on adolescent literacy and reading in the subject areas. Over several days, the teachers read challenging, discipline-based texts, discuss their own strategies for making sense of them, and practice specific classroom routines that might help their students to do the same. They view videotapes of students struggling to read similar academic materials, and they discuss their observations and interpretations with colleagues, coming away with new insights into literacy teaching and learning across the curriculum. However, upon their return to their school – and before they have had a chance to apply these new insights in their own classrooms – their principal asks that they pass along what they learned, presenting the material during a 30 minute segment of an after-school faculty meeting. Surprised by the immediacy of the request, the team decides to hand out a description of one of the instructional routines they had practiced, and to explain how to use it in the classroom.

How much time and other resources are needed to support teachers as they develop their understanding of literacy, learning, and professional decision making?

What responsibility do building administrators have to provide this support?

Scenario 5. And the Poor Get Poorer

A state requires "underperforming" secondary schools to choose from a set of approved reading intervention programs and language arts materials. Most of those schools – almost all of which serve high poverty and language minority populations – no longer assign complete

Conversations Worth Having by Cynthia Greenleaf

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literary works in English classes. Rather, they tend to rely on excerpts and short, commercially-developed texts as the basis for teaching phonics, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. In those schools, teachers are trained in scripted lessons, with pacing guides telling them which lessons they must complete on which day, and with implementation "coaches" assigned to monitor their fidelity to the script. At these schools, professional development resources are limited, and they are allocated entirely to these mandated training programs. Meanwhile, in the state's more affluent and academically successful areas, students continue to read whole literary works, schools invest in professional development, and teachers develop expertise in performance assessment, teaching writing, and teaching advanced reading comprehension.

How can we distribute professional development resources equitably, so that teachers serving the most needy student populations

develop the highest levels of professional knowledge, skill, and capacity?

How can we accelerate students' literacy development in academically rigorous curricula rather than withdrawing students from academic learning opportunities to remediate low literacy skills?

Scenario 6. But What Do I Do on Monday Morning?

Cross-disciplinary teams of teachers from five high schools attend a professional development institute on reading and writing in the content areas. Over several days, they read challenging, discipline-based texts, discuss their own strategies for making sense of them, and practice instructional routines that might help their students to do the same. They view videotapes of students struggling to read similar academic materials, and they discuss their observations and interpretations with colleagues. Three of the five teams go back to their schools ready to apply

new insights into literacy teaching and learning across the curriculum. However, members of the two remaining teams approach the facilitators to complain that they had wanted to learn specific classroom techniques instead of spending so much time discussing cases and studying videotapes. The facilitators point out that case studies and discussions are in fact demonstrations of the kind of instruction they recommend. True, the teachers agree, but while they learned a great deal in the institute, they add, their students cannot learn in this way.

How can we change teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities, helping them recognize their students' capacity for strategic and resourceful thinking and problem solving?

How can we help teachers establish and develop classroom routines and approaches to help students acquire literacy learning strategies?

**Save the Date!
Stay Late!
The Best Comes Last!**



The Secondary Reading Interest Group Presents

Life in the Fast Lane: A Fresh Look at Adolescents' Literacy Practices and Embracing the New Literacies in Schools

**Thursday, May 8th, 2008
12:30 – 3:00 PM**

Speakers: Doug Fisher, Lisa Zawilinski and Donald Leu

A note from the presenters:

Hi there,

We are really looking forward to exchanging ideas with all of you in Atlanta, at the meeting of the Secondary Reading SIG of IRA. We are putting together a presentation that will both challenge and inspire everyone as we think about how to respond to our rapidly changing world. The world of reading comprehension and writing has quickly become digital, socially-networked, multimodal, hyperlinked, and multi-tasking.

It makes our heads swim each day. In that spirit, and in a spirit of fun, we share a wonderful video from YouTube to put you in the mood:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOHX-SjgQvQ>

We think you will get a kick out of how a medieval monk first learned how to use a new technology...the book! He needed to get assistance from the person at the help desk in the monastery.

Cheers,

Don Leu and Lisa Zawilinski

SchoolsMovingUp: Resources for Literacy Reform

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Literacy educators nationwide may benefit from a look at the resources offered at SchoolsMovingUp, one of the initiatives at the WestEd regional laboratory. SchoolsMovingUp provides resources to support educators meet the challenge of raising student achievement in low-performing schools across the nation. While these resources address policy initiatives in the United States, they will no doubt also be of use to educators outside of the US who are working to improve schools through systematic literacy reform efforts.

In an interactive Web format, SchoolsMovingUp offers practitioners knowledge and expertise to help them make sound decisions and take action in their school reform efforts.

Resources include profiles of schools from across the country that have improved student achievement, easily implemented or replicated school and district tips to assist in school improvement efforts, and articles, books, and abstracts offering practical ideas and models for school improvement.

Go to www.wested.org and click on SchoolsMovingUp. There, you will find areas linked to specific resources.

- The Ideas in Action area provides an insider's look into others' school improvement efforts. Browse profiles of successful schools, reform ideas, and tips from educators working on school improvement — each designed to help you make sound decisions and take action.
- The Tools area helps you manage your school improvement process more effectively. Select from a full list of tools at the bottom or browse by area of interest.
- The Reading Room contains articles and books offering practical ideas and models for school improvement. Abstracts of each resource help you quickly find exactly what you need. Search by school improvement topic or full list.
- The Resources area offers links related to school improvement, WestEd products for sale, and a list of free electronic newsletters on important education issues.

In addition, frequent online events bring experts to the Web to share lessons learned, new ideas, and related resources. These events are archived for retrieval and viewing.

- The Events area provides information about upcoming workshops, lectures, and conferences related to school improvement. Access upcoming free online events or browse the events archive, where you can watch and listen to full Web presentations by leaders in the field.

Here is a sampling of recent web seminars, or “webinars”, featuring topics of interest to literacy educators:

Tools for Literacy: Technology to Support Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Development

Kathleen H. McClaskey, EdTech Associates, and Joan Sedita, Keys To Literacy

Reading Science for Understanding in Middle and High School

Cynthia Greenleaf and Willard Brown, WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative

Learning All-Purpose Academic Words

Catherine Snow, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Findings from the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth

Diane August, Center for Applied Linguistics

Word Lists: Choices and Uses

Elfrieda H. Hiebert, University of California at Berkeley

Promising Technology Practices for Struggling Readers

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, National Center for Technology Innovation, and Bridget Dalton, Center for Applied Special Technology

Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent ELLs

Deborah Short Center for Applied Linguistics



District & School-Based Professional Development Approaches for Content Area Literacy Improvement

Diane Waff, Strategic Literacy Initiative at WestEd, and Cathleen Kral, Boston Public Schools

Response to Intervention (RtI) and the Connections to Neurodevelopment

Leigh Burgess, All Kinds of Minds.

What's Happening in Vocabulary Research?

Elfrieda (Freddy) H. Hiebert, University of California, Berkeley

Using Flexible Technology to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners

Julie Duffield, WestEd, and Lisa Wahl, education and assistive technology consultant

What Does the Research Say About Designing Quality Literacy Instruction?

Jane Braunger and Jan Lewis, authors of *Building a Knowledge Base in Reading, 2nd Edition* (IRA and NCTE, 2006).

Adapting a K-12 Reading Model for Middle and Secondary Schools

Terry Salinger, American Institutes for Research

At the SchoolsMovingUp site, you can also register to participate in upcoming “webinars.” Participation can be by phone conference, with conference materials like Power Point slides or reading materials downloaded in advance, or you can participate in a web-based presentation and discussion that allows you to see the Power Point slides as they are presented and discussed, to respond to presenters' questions, and to use a chat feature to ask questions and converse with other participants.

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IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group – Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone: () _____ Fax _____ E-mail: _____

School Affiliation: _____

School Reading Specialist (middle high) College Professor District Reading Specialist
 Classroom Teacher (middle high) School Administrator Other _____

IRA Membership # _____ Expiration Date _____ Renewal New Member

Paid: Check (made out to SRIG) Cash **Mail to : Rita Noon, 2083 Lac Du Mont, Haslett, MI 48840**

.....
Receipt

Received from: _____ Amount: \$10.00

For membership in IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group (SRIG)

From: May 200____ to May 200____ Paid: Check Cash

Rita Noon, Treasurer/Membership Chairperson