The What and the How
of Good Classroom Reading Instruction
in the Elementary Grades

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Educators have learned a great deal from research about what it takes to help all children in the elementary grades succeed in reading to their fullest potential. To reach this goal, teachers and administrators within schools need to work together to develop and deliver a sound school-wide reading program. Within the confines of their own classrooms, teachers must focus and reflect equally on the **What** and the **How** of their reading instruction, and they must continuously make good pedagogical choices to meet individual students' needs based on these reflections. While this, at first, may seem like a daunting set of tasks for schools and teachers, the ongoing journey towards reaching these achievable goals is energizing and rewarding once progress in all students' reading achievement is being made.

In this paper, I will focus on a) the **What** and the **How** of sound, research-based classroom reading instruction for grades K-5, b) essential elements of an effective, school-wide reading program, and c) research-validated strategies that a school can use to reach these goals. In this discussion, I will cite relevant research, and I will also draw heavily on my own experiences and related data sources. During the last ten years, I have learned a great deal about effective classroom reading instruction as I have visited and worked closely with 80 moderate-to-high poverty, largely diverse schools within Minnesota and across the U.S. and the more than 1600 teachers in these schools (Taylor,

Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005; Taylor & Peterson, 2006a; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b; Taylor & Peterson, 2006c). Through their involvement in a multi-year reading improvement effort, most of these schools have made slow, but steady progress towards the establishment of a sound school-wide reading program, and a substantial majority of the teachers within these schools have become confident and skilled at providing effective, balanced reading instruction that meets individual students' needs. The success of these schools and the teachers within them should provide encouragement to schools that have committed, albeit anxiously, to a similar reading improvement endeavor.

Effective Classroom Reading Instruction in Grades K-5

First, I will briefly review the **What** of sound reading instruction; that is, those components of effective reading instruction supported by scientifically-based reading research that are related to the abilities that students need to develop to become competent readers: instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Because these important aspects of effective classroom reading instruction have been extensively covered elsewhere (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and most elementary teachers have had recent professional development on the "five dimensions of reading" under No Child Left Behind legislation, the topic will be covered fairly quickly and serve as what I hope is a useful review.

I will spend a little more time on the **How** of sound teaching of reading in the classroom because, in my many visits to elementary classrooms in recent years, I have seen that this is the part of effective reading instruction with which teachers most

struggle. Not only do teachers have to masterfully orchestrate their instruction of all of the essential dimensions of reading, but they have to do so with good pacing and clarity of purpose tied to individual students' needs and abilities. They also need to continually focus on providing intellectual challenge to all. In the final section of this paper, I will discuss strategies that involve teachers in collaborative learning opportunities in which they support one another as they become increasingly effective teachers of reading.

The What of Effective Classroom Reading Instruction

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Based on extensive research, it is clear that most students benefit from systematic explicit instruction in the development of phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Stahl, 2001). Kindergarten students and, as needed, students in early first grade, profit from small group, focused instruction in phonemic awareness that deals, in particular, with learning how to hear the individual phonemes, or sounds, in words (phonemic segmentation), and in learning how to blend phonemes together to pronounce words (phonemic blending). The practice of having students manipulate letters while working on the auditory abilities of segmentation and blending has also been found to be effective (National Reading Panel, 2000). Focusing on a few important aspects of phonemic awareness (e.g., segmentation and blending) was reported in the National Reading Panel Report (2000) as more effective than focusing on many aspects, and training was found to be most effective when it was between 5 and 18 hours of instruction spread out across short lessons during the first year or two of school.

The National Reading Panel (2000) confirmed extensive earlier research (see Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1991; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Stahl, 2001) that children,

especially in kindergarten and first grade, benefit from systematic, explicit phonics instruction. The National Reading Panel also recommended that teachers help children apply their phonics knowledge accurately and fluently in their daily reading and writing activities (p. 2-135). Most importantly, children need the opportunity to read books in which newly learned phonic elements occur. Complementary research has found that, relative to others, teachers see more growth in their students' reading during kindergarten, first and second grade when they are more often observed coaching students as they try to decode words while reading (as opposed to telling children unknown words; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b; Taylor & Peterson, 2006c).

Fluency instruction. Oral reading procedures to develop fluency, in which students receive guidance or support, have a significant impact on students' reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). For example, effective fluency procedures include repeated reading of the same text, in which a student receives feedback from a teacher or other coach, and assisted reading, in which a student reads varied texts with support from a teacher or other skilled reader, or reads after listening to a skilled reader (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000). Stahl (2004) cautioned that fluency is one ability of a competent reader but alone is not sufficient. Also, he found that fluency practice was most important in first and second grade, with other aspects of reading gaining importance in third grade and higher.

Vocabulary instruction. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that vocabulary instruction leads to gains in reading comprehension, a finding that is not surprising given the strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading

comprehension ability (Nagy & Scott, 2000). The National Reading Panel and others (Bauman & Kame'enui, 2004; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Graves, in press) have reported that use of a variety of instructional approaches is beneficial. Effective techniques include direct instruction in specific words, pre-reading instruction in words, learning of words in rich contexts, learning to use strategies to determine word meanings, and learning of words incidentally through wide reading. The Panel reported that words studied should generally be those the learner will find useful in many contexts. Also, repeated exposure to words in authentic contexts is helpful as is active engagement in learning words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Comprehension strategies instruction. Skilled readers use active, strategic processes to foster good comprehension. Fortunately, instruction in comprehension strategies that students can use as they read has been found to improve their reading comprehension abilities (National Reading Panel, 2000; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b).

There are many good suggestions in contemporary books and articles about which comprehension strategies should be taught (Lipson, in press; Pressley, 2006). Because instructional time is precious, I believe it makes the most sense for teachers to focus on the teaching of strategies supported by multiple studies. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that explicit lessons in the following strategies were most effective: comprehension monitoring, use of graphic and semantic organizers, use of story structure, question answering, and question generation. Perhaps most importantly, teaching students how to use multiple strategies in naturalistic contexts, such as in whole class or small group interactions, was found to be effective (National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley, 2006).

Comprehension strategy instruction is different from more traditional comprehension skill instruction and observed in classrooms much less often (Taylor et al, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 200bc). In traditional comprehension skill instruction, students are asked to identify an aspect of comprehension such as a main idea or a cause and effect or to engage in a comprehension task when prompted such as making a prediction or giving a retelling. With comprehension strategies instruction, the goal is to use explicit instruction to teach students strategies that they ultimately will use unprompted when reading independently. Comprehension strategies are difficult to teach well, perhaps in part because a teacher has to model by talking aloud about something that he does subconsciously as a skilled reader. However, with ongoing professional development, teachers can become skilled in providing effective comprehension strategies instruction that enhances students' reading abilities (Duffy, Roehler, Sivan, Rackliffe, Book, & Meloth, 1987; Garcia, Taylor, & Pearson, 2006; Pressley, 2006).

High level talk and writing about text. Teaching students how to engage in high level talk and writing about text is another important aspect of comprehension instruction that has been found repeatedly to be related to reading gains (Knapp, 1995; Lipson, in press; Pressley, 2006; Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor et al, 2005; Taylor et al, 2006a; Taylor et al, 2006b; Taylor et al, 2006c). Teachers see more reading growth in their students, as compared to other teachers, when they are more often observed asking challenging questions such as a) those that students must pause and think about before answering, b) those that ask students to interpret a story at a high level, and c) those that get students to make connections between a text and their own experiences or with events in the world about them. Teachers are observed asking low level questions much more frequently than

high level questions (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor et al, 2006a; Taylor et al, 2006b; Taylor et al, 2006c), but with ongoing, reflective professional development, they can make important changes in the frequency with which they engage all students in high level talk and writing about text.

   Making good instructional choices to meet individual students' needs. Students within classrooms are at different levels of competence related to phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge and decoding abilities, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension abilities. Many of the instructional materials for reading lessons that teachers teach from today contain numerous worthwhile instructional suggestions. However, a teacher needs to make good choices in the use of these materials based on students' abilities, as determined by assessment data, and her teaching purposes, which will vary at times for different students. For example, a second grade student who is already reading a chapter book mid year is not likely to profit from completing a phonics worksheet on an already mastered symbol-sound correspondence (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor & Peterson, 2006c). On the other hand, a learning disabled second grader who is struggling with reading is likely to benefit from such an explicit phonics lesson (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The How of Providing Effective Classroom Reading Instruction

   Teaching effectively within the elementary classroom so that all children are reading competently to their fullest potential is a challenging endeavor that includes much more than "covering the basics" or, in other words, simply teaching the content of the "five dimensions of reading." A teacher needs to plan for and coordinate many different components of her lessons and students' learning activities during a 90 to 120

minute reading block. Usually, other classroom or resource teachers collaborate instructionally during parts of this block, but typically, it is the classroom teacher who is most "in charge" of her students' literacy learning.

Every day, a classroom teacher needs to have a good balance between whole group and small group instruction; to consider the purposes and timing of her lessons; and to provide students with challenging, motivating activities as they are working on their own or with other students. She also needs to consider the balance between students' active and passive involvement in their learning activities as well as the balance between a) leading the learning, questioning, and other activities during large and small group lessons and b) providing support in the form of judicious coaching and offering feedback as students are actively participating in literacy learning activities.

Clarity of purpose and meeting individual needs. During the 2005-2006 school year, I visited more than 1000 K-3 classrooms in 52 schools across the state of Minnesota. Half of the teachers had been working diligently to reflect on and enhance their reading instruction as part of a school-wide reading improvement effort over a 2-and-a-half year period, and half had been working at this for a year or less at the time of my visit to their school. My notes reflected many more questions about clarity of purpose and the meeting of individual needs in the group of teachers who were new to the project than in the more experienced group. A comment I jotted down with some regularity in my visits to the classrooms of teachers who were newer to the project was that a particular lesson or activity I observed did not seem to be the best activity for the students involved in the lesson. In other words, I did not clearly see how the lesson was maximally moving the students forward in their literacy learning. This observation points to the

challenge and complexity of teaching continuously with good purposes for students who are at different places in their literacy development and who have different needs, especially in areas such as phonemic awareness and word recognition development.

A teacher needs to continually reflect on the purpose or multiple purposes of any lesson as related to the students with whom he is working. He also needs to continuously reflect on the timing of different aspects of a lesson. In our school-wide reading improvement project, teachers study classroom observations of their teaching, reflect with a peer coach on particular lessons, and engage with other teachers in video sharing of their own teaching. For particular segments of the lesson being reviewed, teachers ask themselves, "What are the purposes of this part of my lesson? Are they the "right" purposes for the students with whom I am working? Is this part of the lesson going to move the students forward in their literacy abilities? Am I spending the right amount of time on X in this part of my lesson?"

In general, it has been my observation that teachers may spend time on dimensions of reading that some students have already mastered, such as phonics. These lessons have an ineffective instructional purpose for the students in question, and this ends up as time not well spent for these students. (This observation is supported by research showing that too much time spent on phonics in grades 2 and 3 is not helpful for students' reading growth in general, Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor and Peterson, 2006c.) For example, if a group of second grade students are already reading chapter books, an explicit lesson on the sound to give "er," "ir," and "ur" when reading is probably not a good use of the students' time. On the other hand, a phonics lesson may be appropriate for the particular students being taught, but more time is spent on the activity than is

needed. For example, in kindergarten, it may be helpful to do a quick review of the sounds for letters that have been recently taught. However, I would argue that the pacing is too slow if children come up one at a time to point to instances of these letters in words that are part of a morning message or poem written on a chart or white board.

A second important aspect of meeting individual needs involves the constant use of assessment data to determine students' reading abilities and to monitor their progress. Schools have grown more sophisticated in their use of assessments to look at students' reading abilities and progress under No Child Left Behind in general and in particular through programs such as Reading First which require the use of such assessments. In my many school observations, however, a weak link often exists in the connection between assessment data on students' status and growth in reading and needed changes in teaching to better meet individual students' needs. In our work in schools, we help teachers focus on questions such as the following, "If a particular child is not growing as a reader, what else should I be doing?" "What does this assessment data tell me about how I need to adjust my teaching for this student or a group of students?" For example, if a student in first grade is reading at 60 words correct per minute at the end of the school year, it may make more sense for that child to be reading his basal reader story or a leveled reader independently than to first hear the story read aloud by the teacher as he had been doing earlier in the year. So from the fluency data a teacher may be saying, "It's time to make a change in how this child is asked to read a 'new' story; that is, a story not yet read."

A third important aspect of teaching with regard for individual differences involves culturally responsive instruction in which teachers build on students' cultural strengths in the classroom (Au, 2006). Effective teachers have high expectations for all

students and make connections between students' experiences at home and school. These connections may be made both through the process and the content of instruction (Au, 2006). In terms of process, teachers may find it helpful to structure interaction in ways that depart from the typical pattern of individual recitation, which takes the form of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation. For example, teachers may allow students to work together to formulate a response, encouraging them to speak in a collaborative manner, or teachers may go around the group quickly asking for a brief response from each student. In terms of content, teachers can use multicultural literature, including some works that celebrate students' own cultural heritage and others that introduce them to new cultural perspectives.

Providing intellectual challenge for all. In the previous section, I provided the example of a phonics lesson for students who were already reading fluently out of chapter books as most likely an unhelpful lesson for those students, based on their abilities. The lesson was "too easy," or something they had already mastered. However, as mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, high level thinking related to texts that are read is an important reading comprehension activity for **all** students and is not something that is "mastered" (Paris, 2005; Taylor, et al, 2003; Taylor & Pearson, 2004). This activity, high level talk and writing about text, should not be misconstrued as part of a reading lesson that is "too hard" for some students. For example, although some may say that young English language learners are not "ready" to do much talking about a story they have read or heard, English language learners in the primary grades have, in fact, been found to benefit from high level talk and writing about texts (Taylor, 2004).

In my visits to the classrooms of teachers who are new to our school improvement project, I often see relatively little in the way of challenging activities that engage students in high level thinking about texts. On the other hand, in my visit to classrooms in schools with which we have been working for two years or more, I am often impressed with the increases in high level talk and writing about text that I observe as compared to previous years. This perception is also supported by the observation data we have collected to provide teachers with feedback on their instruction (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b).

Grouping practices and independent student activities. Another aspect of the "how" of expert classroom reading instruction that requires purposeful planning involves grouping practices and independent student activities. Data from our extensive Minnesota school-wide reading improvement project has shown it is important for teachers to provide a good balance between whole class and small group instruction (Taylor et al, 2006a; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b; and Taylor & Peterson, 2006c). Not surprisingly, having almost all whole group or almost all small group instruction has not been found to be beneficial to students' overall reading growth. Too much whole group instruction tends to lead to high levels of passive student responding. Often, students are "tuning out" as the teacher is talking or another student is either reading aloud or answering a question the teacher has posed. On the flip side, too much small group instruction leads to large amounts of independent "seatwork" time for students that may primarily be "busywork." Without constant teacher reflection, there is a tendency for seatwork activities to be at cognitively low levels as students engage in tasks such as: a) completing workbook pages or other low level response sheets; b) playing phonics,

grammar, or vocabulary games; c) copying spelling words or sentences out of a story; d) listening to stories on tape with no expected follow-up; e) reading books that are too easy; or f) rereading books more times than is helpful (Taylor & Peterson, 2006c). However, with ongoing professional development that focuses on providing motivating, challenging independent activities (e.g., students selecting from multiple open-ended response sheets that require high level thinking; researching and writing reports; asking and answering high level questions with a partner; writing on sticky notes about comprehension strategies used, queries generated, or "new" vocabulary encountered), teachers have been found to make significant improvements in the quality of their independent seatwork activities over time (Taylor & Peterson, 2006c).

Teacher and student actions. Two aspects of the **How** of good classroom reading instruction focus on the stance a teacher is using as she teaches and the amount of active pupil involvement in literacy learning a teacher provides for her students. Research has shown that a teacher needs to have a good balance between the use of a teacher-directed stance, in which the teacher is front and center as she is telling students information and leading recitations, and a student-support stance, in which the teacher is providing coaching and feedback as students are front and center in a learning activity the teacher has structured (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor & Peterson, 2006a; Taylor & Peterson, 2006c). In general, research has found that patterns of very high levels of telling and leading of recitations by teachers (e.g., almost all of the time) and the absence of moderate levels of coaching and providing feedback have been negatively related to students' reading growth.

My frequent visits to elementary classrooms have left me with the impression that teachers often do not consciously reflect on their stance towards instruction. However, expert teaching of reading within the classroom requires deliberate, daily reflection by a teacher about times she needs to use a teacher-directed stance to introduce or review new information, strategies, or ideas and times she needs to switch to a student-support stance to allow students the opportunity to practice using strategies or information learned. With ongoing, reflective professional development, teachers do modify their balance between use of a teacher-directed and student-support stance during reading instruction to the benefit of students and their reading growth (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor & Peterson, 2006a; Taylor & Peterson, 2006b).

My classroom visits and analyses of observation data over the years have also led me to the conclusion that teachers need to carefully balance the amount of time that students are passively involved in their literacy learning (e.g., listening to the teacher or waiting for their turn in round-robin reading) with the amount of time that students are actively participating (e.g., actually reading on their own instead of listening to someone else read or writing a reaction to an event in a story). Receiving feedback from colleagues and reflecting on one's own practices can go a long way towards helping a teacher achieve a good balance in instructional stances used and in active/passive responding opportunities provided to her students.

Essential Elements of an Effective School-Wide Reading Program

In our work with schools, we stress the importance of all teachers working together in the development of a cohesive, school-wide reading program (Taylor & Peterson, 2006a). Essential aspects to discuss and collaborate on include, but are not

limited to, the following: a) collaboration amongst classroom teachers and resource teachers (e.g., Title 1, special education, English language learner teachers) in whatever delivery model is chosen to provide cohesive, exemplary reading instruction that best meets students' varying needs; b) amount of time for reading instruction across different grades and blocks of time during the school day allotted for this instruction; c) establishment of cross-grade, coordinated learning goals for students related to state and district standards, and alignment of student learning goals with wise use of curricular materials, effective instruction, and useful assessments; d) a school-wide assessment plan in which student data is collected and used regularly to inform instruction, and e) the interventions that are in place to meet the needs of students who are experiencing reading difficulties, who have special education needs, and who are English language learners. Also, working effectively with parents as partners is another important component of an effective school-wide reading program (Edwards, 2004; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2002), but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

As hard as it is to develop a coherent, school-wide reading program, I have observed that it may be even harder for teachers, inadvertently, to keep the students at the forefront of this development effort. That is, when teachers are trying to decide what grade levels should have reading at what times and which resource teachers should work with which classroom teachers at what times and in what manners, it is easy to think about what works best for "us" (as teachers) rather than what works best for our students to meet their needs. However, research on effective schools has found that teachers in effective schools do continually "put the children first" (Taylor, Pressley, and Pearson, 2002).

Delivery model. The delivery model in which classroom teachers and resource teachers provide reading instruction to accommodate the different needs of students is an important component of a school-wide reading program, and one on which there may not be good consensus, even within a grade level. It is also an area in which it is relatively easy to lose sight of the "put the children first" motto. For example, if fourth grade teachers use a delivery model in which they spend 45 minutes on whole group instruction in the basal with their homeroom and then all students go to another fourth grade teacher for 45 minutes for ability-grouped instruction, is this because teachers prefer it this way, or is it because students achieve more this way? If classroom and resource teachers in second grade use a delivery model in which students go down the hall, let alone to the other end of the building, to receive a small group intervention, is this what is most beneficial for the students? We have found support in the primary grades for a delivery model in which resource teachers, for the most part, come into the regular classroom to provide instruction designed to meet students' varying needs (Taylor & Peterson, 2003). However, there are strengths and weakness to any delivery model. Regardless of the delivery model that teachers use, they need to ask themselves, "What are the pitfalls of our delivery model and what are we doing to minimize these pitfalls?" For example, if in a delivery model students "travel" down the hall for a portion of their daily instruction, what is being done to minimize the time that students travel to and from and what is being done to foster communication across teachers who share responsibility for the complete, coherent instructional program for individual students?

Time spent on reading instruction. The amount of time that is devoted to reading instruction is another important component of a school-wide reading program. In

one study, we found that primary grade students in effective schools spent about 135 minutes a day on reading instruction, exclusive of writing, spelling, and grammar instruction (Taylor et al, 2000). In Reading First schools in Minnesota, as in many other states, 120 minutes of reading instruction is required in grades K-3, and we have found that the amount of time spent on reading is related to students' reading growth (Taylor & Peterson, 2003). While we tell teachers in schools in which we work that at least 120 minutes of reading instruction in the primary grades and at least 90 minutes in the intermediate grades is essential, we in the same breath make the point that the time spent on reading instruction alone won't make the difference that is needed to raise the bar and close the achievement gap in high poverty, diverse schools. The substantial commitment to total minutes of reading instruction in the elementary school day needs to be minutes of effective instruction that meets students' varying needs.

Alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Finally, in this section, I will briefly address the alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. In recent years, district staff, generally speaking, have provided the leadership for schools in this area, following on the footsteps of state efforts to revise standards and assessments related to reading under No Child Left Behind. At the school level, I see one challenge for the many teachers with whom I work to be that of balancing the coverage of content necessary to help students reach state standards and pass required tests without losing sight of the more general goal of teaching students to be competent, motivated readers and independent learners. Teachers need to have heartfelt discussions with each other about the balance between covering the basics and teaching for life-long learning. By working, planning, and learning together while focusing on good instruction

and using instructional materials wisely, teachers can find much of the support they need from one another to provide the competent reading instruction necessary for students to achieve state standards, pass required tests, and perhaps most importantly, become successful, thinking, independent readers and learners.

The Development of an Excellent School-Wide Reading Program

A development of a successful school-wide reading program requires collaboration, intellectually challenging professional development, and leadership. I will briefly discuss each of these elements below.

Collaboration. In our Minnesota School Change in Reading Project, we open with, often return to, and end with the message that teachers and administrators within a school need to work together to develop a sound, successful school-wide reading program. Early on in our two-to-three year professional development project, we introduce the concept of collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy, 2004); that is, reaching a goal by pooling efforts and strengths. We ask teachers to read about and discuss the importance of collective efficacy as related to the success of their school-wide reading effort. The task of teaching all students to read well may seem overwhelming if individuals feel they are "going it alone." But if teachers perceive that they are seriously working together to achieve the goal of all students reading well by sharing expertise and supporting one another, they are more likely to be successful. With a sense of collective efficacy well-established, teachers are also likely to develop a greater sense of self-efficacy as teachers of reading, and through their collective and individual efforts, experience the joys of seeing students' reading scores grow.

We have seen that teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy within a school are related to students' growth in reading (Taylor and Peterson, 2006c). Of course, it is easier to learn about the importance of collective efficacy than it is to actively develop it within a school. However, with a plan for improving reading in place that the majority of the teachers have bought into and with strong leadership to help the school move forward, collective efficacy does develop. We have seen perceptions of collective efficacy grow in schools as teachers learn together in collaborative professional development, as they look at assessment data and see that their students are reading better than in previous years, and as teacher leadership grows within buildings (Taylor & Peterson, 2006b).

Intellectually challenging professional development. For students' reading scores to go up measurably, teachers need to modify their reading instruction. This requires long-term, school-based professional development in which teachers learn together about research-based practices; support each other as they implement new strategies and techniques; and as they reflect on their teaching, provide suggestions to become even more effective. In our work with teachers, we stress that professional learning should be intellectually stimulating and that "suggestions for getting even better" are a positive feature of this learning that teachers should come to expect and, in fact, demand.

One professional development opportunity that teachers use to engage in intellectually challenging learning comes from focused study groups. Teachers read about effective, research-based reading instruction and share experiences from their classrooms once they have tried out new techniques (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor et al, 2005). We hear a lot about study groups today, but without leaders to keep study groups focused on

substantive topics, to prevent dialogue from getting off-task, and to help people continually reflect on their instruction and discuss ways to improve, study groups can become mundane. We have found that having a study group action plan; having rotating study group leaders; having a time keeper; and having a recorder who documents the activities, reflections, and next steps of a group are techniques that help keep study groups stimulating and effective (Taylor and Peterson, in press).

Another strategy that leads to intellectually challenging professional learning is one that focuses on video sharing at study group sessions (Taylor et al, 2003; Taylor et al, 2005). Teachers bring in 5-7 minute clips of their teaching and use a protocol to a) discuss things that the students were doing well related to a focus area, b) discuss things the teacher was doing well related to the focus, c) offer suggestions that might have made the lesson even more effective, and d) share personal reflections about what they learned from watching another teacher's video.

Having a peer come into the classroom to first model and then coach on the use of a new instructional technique is another strategy that we use to improve instruction (Taylor and Peterson, in press). Again we recommend the use of protocols to focus on strengths and to legitimize the offering of suggestions from one teacher to another to help individuals make modifications to an instructional routine, all with the goal of becoming more effective.

One additional technique that we use to help teachers think about instruction is through self-reflection, with help from a peer, on a written observation of one's teaching. We recommend that teachers use a set of self-reflection questions to help them assess the effectiveness of research-based practices that focus on a) balance and timing in the

teaching of skills and strategies, b) balance in asking of higher and lower level questions, c) balance in use of a teacher-directed and student-support stance, d) balance in opportunities for students to actively and passively participate in their literacy lessons, and e) the quality of their lesson purposes, based on students' needs and abilities.

Many schools are engaged in school-wide reading improvement efforts and are working hard to teach all students to read well in the elementary grades. Teachers are learning new instructional routines in workshops and are trying out newly purchased materials. Schools are hiring literacy coaches who provide support to teachers in their classrooms. Time for reading instruction may increase and uninterrupted blocks of time for reading may be scheduled. However, without all teachers trying their level best to provide the most effective, differentiated instruction possible to meet all students' needs, these efforts won't suffice.

In my ten years of studying school-wide reading improvement efforts and effective classroom reading instruction and in my many, many visits to schools and classroom over these years, I have observed that serious reflection on and relentless efforts to improve teaching practices are missing pieces of most school-wide reading improvement efforts. In short, teachers need to work together to reflect on and make their reading instruction even more effective. Leaders need to provide the support and encouragement necessary to make this possible.

Leadership. This leads me to one final topic; a school needs an effective principal who leads a school-wide reading improvement effort and who fosters teacher leaders in this effort (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Fullan, 2005; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2002). A principal needs to have a) a sound knowledge

about good, research-based reading instruction and b) an understanding of what this looks like in the classroom. He or she needs to have demonstrated enthusiasm for and participated in the effort and also needs to support teachers in their work to improve reading instruction to more effectively meet students' needs. He or she needs to encourage teachers to step up to the plate and provide leadership to the school-wide improvement effort as well. Without effective leadership, it is too easy for a challenging, long-term effort to improve reading, one that is based on serious reflection and change, to languish and die (Fullan, 2006).

In our school improvement work, we help schools establish a leadership team in which teachers increasingly take responsibility for leading the day-to-day reform efforts. Responsibilities include setting agendas for whole group meetings; keeping study groups intellectually challenging; encouraging self-reflection by setting good examples and taking the lead in trying new things, like video sharing; keeping conversations positive; and generally, maintaining high expectations for students and teachers.

Also, in our model, principals need to understand practices that lead to successful sustainability so they can help teachers understand what is required to sustain their hard-won efforts. We have found Leadership and Sustainability: Systems Thinkers in Action by Michael Fullan (2005) a helpful book for principals and leadership team members to read and discuss.

Concluding Comments

As I finish my yearly round of visits to schools and classrooms, I am reminded of and humbled by the fact that teaching reading well to meet all students' needs and to help them all grow is a daunting task. As I watch the children in my visits, I am energized by

the reminder that providing excellent reading instruction is so important because it touches children's lives in substantial ways.

I am also encouraged by the changes in teaching that I observe this year as compared to last. I see fewer workbooks and more books on desks, more children reading and then writing about what they have read, more teachers in small groups teaching reading skills explicitly but also focusing on meaningful comprehension and vocabulary lessons.

In these schools that are well on their way to providing effective reading instruction, there is still more that can be done to meet students' varying needs as readers and to challenge them all. However, visible progress toward this goal is being made. What are some key reasons for this progress? Teachers have seen real growth in their students' reading abilities. This, in turn, has raised their expectations for their students and has renewed teachers' personal interest in continuing to learn together about becoming even more effective as teachers of reading. Also, teachers better understand and are more comfortable with the routines of their school improvement effort in the second year as compared to the first. Teacher leaders are taking more responsibility for helping the improvement effort stay positively focused and moving forward.

Teaching all children to read well requires excellent reading instruction. Teachers need to remind themselves that materials don't teach, teachers do. With that power comes the responsibility to teach effectively. By working together as a school, teachers and administrators can make a real difference in their students' success as readers. The possibilities are exciting.

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