

READING

The following material is summarized and directly copied from “Applying Research in Reading for Adults: First Steps for Teachers,” by Susan McShane, which can be downloaded from the NCSALL website, www.ncsall.net.

What Does the Adult Education Research Say?

The resource of first resort for adult educators is *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* (Kruidenier, 2002), a report of the research review done by the Reading Research Working Group (RRWG). Conclusions and suggestions presented in the report are from a fairly small body of experimental and non-experimental research in adult education, about 70 qualifying studies. A series of “emerging principles” described in the report are based on results from at least two experimental studies and any number of non-experimental studies.

Because very little experimental research on adult reading instruction has been done, the findings are carefully phrased. Note the frequent use of the word *may*, which indicates that further research is required to establish the validity of these results.

Most of the adult research was done with native speakers of English. Unless ESOL adults are specifically mentioned, the principles listed may not apply to them.

In this notebook, the Kruidenier’s Principles which emerged from the research will be listed, followed by Tips in a Nutshell or Effective Strategies.

Phonemic Awareness Training and Phonics Instruction

English is an alphabetic language, which means that written English uses symbols (letters) that represent the sounds in spoken words. When sounding out” a word, we not only must (1) know and be able to produce the sounds the letters represent; we must also be able to (2) blend those sounds as we hear them in sequence, and (3) recognize the word. Beginning reading instruction often focuses on step 1, which is the heart of the phonics approach. We teach beginners the sounds of the letters, thinking that is all they need. But for many learners, the process breaks down at steps 2 and 3 because of a lack of phonemic awareness.

Principle 2: Adult nonreaders have virtually no phonemic awareness ability and are unable to consistently perform, on their own, almost all phonemic awareness tasks.

Principle 3: Adult beginning readers, like all beginning readers, including children, perform poorly on phonemic awareness tasks that require phoneme manipulation. The ability to perform more complex operations with phonemes generally increases (in adults without a reading disability) along with reading ability until word analysis is established.

Principle 6: Phonemic awareness and/or word analysis instruction may lead to increased achievement in other aspects of reading for adult beginning readers.

Phonemic Awareness Tips in a Nutshell

- _ Teach phonemic awareness explicitly and systematically to learners who have phonemic awareness deficiencies.

- _ Use letters as well as sounds in teaching the phonemes. Use a structured phonics curriculum to develop phonemic awareness and decoding skills.
- _ Focus on one or two types of phonemic tasks; blending and segmenting may be useful.
- _ Be sure learners understand the connection between phonemic awareness activities and their long-term reading goals.
- _ Integrate short phonemic awareness activities within the reading lesson. In each lesson, try to address all needed components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—as well as opportunities to experience and learn from adult-relevant materials.

Principle 4: Adult beginning readers, like other beginning readers, have difficulty applying letter-sound knowledge in order to figure out new or unfamiliar words while reading, although they are generally better at recognizing familiar sight words than children who are learning to read.

Phonics Instruction Tips in a Nutshell

- _ Assess phonics skills of adult beginning and (some) intermediate-level readers.
- _ Provide explicit, systematic phonics instruction that is matched to the assessed needs of learners.
- _ Follow a defined scope and sequence of skills or adopt a structured phonics-based program.
- _ Provide practice of the phonics elements you have taught, including (perhaps) use of controlled-vocabulary tests.
- _ Do not make decoding skills the entire focus of the reading lesson. In each lesson, address the other needed component skills as well, and provides opportunities for learners to gain access of adult-interest reading materials.

Fluency Development

Principle 8: Fluency is an issue for adult beginning readers, intermediate readers, and perhaps for those reading at more advanced ABE levels. There are very large differences between adults with good and poor reading fluency, and adult beginning readers' fluency is similar to the fluency of children who are beginning readers.

Principle 9: Fluency may be taught to ABE students and fluency practice may lead to increases in reading achievement.

Principle 10: Fluency may be taught using approaches that include the repeated reading of passages of text, words from texts, and other texts.

Fluency Tips in a Nutshell

- _ Use a fluency measure with (at least) beginning and intermediate-level readers to get an initial assessment of reading speed, accuracy, and expression. (You may need more than one measure to address these different aspects of fluency.)
- _ Use guided repeated oral reading techniques to build reading fluency. A learner may read aloud to, or in unison with, a teacher or tutor, who provides modeling and assistance.
- _ Audiotapes allow adults to work independently on repeated oral reading.
- _ Preparing for “performance reading”—classroom presentation or reading to children—gives adults an authentic reason to re-read text.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary refers to knowledge of word meanings. Oral vocabulary is defined as the words we can use and understand in speaking and listening and reading vocabulary is defined as the store of words we recognize and understand in print. Vocabulary is vital to reading comprehension.

Effective Strategies in Vocabulary Instruction

- _ Pre-teach words in instructional texts.
- _ Ensure multiple exposures.
- _ Keep learners actively engaged.
- _ Teach word-learning strategies.
 - Introduce common prefixes and suffixes and demonstrate how they alter the meaning and function of base words. (Using word parts like these to identify and define words is called *structural analysis*.)
 - Teach specific strategies for using context clues to derive the meaning of unknown words.
 - Teach learners how to use a dictionary.
- _ Teach indirect approaches to word learning.
 - Encourage wide reading in varied subject matter areas. Vocabulary is often acquired indirectly through reading.
- _ Choose words to teach.
 - Useful words:
 - _ Signal words and phrases that mark relationships between ideas and information, like *therefore, in contrast, however, consequently, although, despite*.
 - _ Idiomatic expressions, like *by the skin of your teeth*
 - _ Words in the news
 - _ Subject-matter terminology
 - Teach difficult words:
 - _ Homophones
 - _ Homographs

Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

Because comprehension requires basic decoding skills and fluency, comprehension-strategy instruction is most often directed at mid-high level readers. In fact, the research reviewed by the National Reading Panel was conducted with students in third grade and above. However, even beginners need to engage in meaningful reading and therefore can benefit from learning to monitor their understanding and to apply some simple strategies as they read. We may conclude, then, that all the adults in basic education classrooms, regardless of their reading level, can benefit from comprehension-strategy instruction. Meaningful reading, including practice of important comprehension strategies, should be part of every lesson for all adult learners.

Principle 11: Adults who qualify for ABE have poor functional literacy comprehension achievement. Although they may be able to perform simple comprehension tasks, such as recalling ideas from simple stories and locating a single piece of information in a simple text, they are often unable to combine (integrate and synthesize) information from longer or more complex texts.

Principle 12: ESL adults, on average, tend to have lower functional literacy comprehension achievement in English; the percentage of ESL adults among the ABE target population is greater than the percentage among the general population.

Principle 13: Adults with a learning disability tend, on average, to have lower functional literacy comprehension achievement and are over-represented within the ABE target population.

Principle 14: Participation in an adult literacy program may lead to an increase in reading comprehension achievement.

Principle 15: Providing explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies may lead to increased reading comprehension achievement.

Effective Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

1. Comprehension Monitoring

The following strategies are intended to develop meta-cognitive abilities in readers, that is, to help them think about their own thinking. Using these techniques, readers learn how to (1) actively monitor their understanding, (2) identify specific problems when comprehension breaks down, and (3) take steps to solve their comprehension problems.

A. Thinking aloud

- Stopping to reread or restate a difficult section
- Summarizing long sentences or other bits of text and putting them in your own words.
- Looking back in the text to locate the person or thing that a pronoun refers to
- Identifying important or not-so-important information
- Using various strategies to identify or determine the meaning of an unknown word.

B. Restating – stopping periodically and trying to restate what’s been read in their own words

C. Asking questions – ask themselves, who, what, when, where and why questions after each

section or page. If they can't answer these questions they know to stop and reread.

- D. Coding text – students actively engage with the content when they make notes as they read.
- E. Monitoring and repairing strategies - teach appropriate repair strategies by modeling, providing guided practice, and independent practice.

2. Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are diagrams or charts that visually represent the relationship of ideas and information. Most often they are used to illustrate the organization and structure of a text. Organizers are most often used with nonfiction. Start with a simple organizer. Explain the purpose of the tool and when to use it. Work in groups first.

The next four pages (pages 84-87 from McShane's publication) are examples of graphic organizers.

3. Story Structure

The idea of teaching story structure is based on the fact that all stories have similar features and all have plots that are organized into episodes. By analyzing a story's structure, the reader becomes aware of the important story elements, and this awareness facilitates comprehension and memory.

To introduce this strategy begin with these five questions that represent the basic story elements

- Who is/are the main character(s)?
- Where and when did the story occur?
- What did the main character(s) do?
- How did the story end?
- How did the main character feel?

4. Question Answering

The goal of question-answering instruction is to help students in learning to answer questions while reading and thus learn more from a text. Research suggests that you should ask factual questions and questions that demand higher-level thinking and use of background knowledge in combination with textual information.

In this process teach readers to make inferences and to analyze questions to see where and how to find the answers.

5. Question Generating

The question-generating strategy may be used in reading both fiction and nonfiction texts. By showing learners how to be questioners and encouraging them to analyze their questions to decide where the answers may be found, you are helping them to become active readers and thinkers.

If you pay attention to your thoughts, you may discover that when you are having a "comprehension breakdown," you ask questions like these:

- What's going on here?
- Why did the character say that?
- Why is the author so emphatic about this point?
- Why did the author include this information? What's the connection with the last section?

6. Summarization

The aim of summarization is to teach the reader to identify the main or central ideas of a paragraph of a series of paragraphs. During this process, teach how to identify the main idea and how to summarize.

7. Multiple Strategies Instruction

Many of the strategies above are best used within a multiple-strategies approach. In the studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel two or more strategies were taught in the context of an interaction between teacher and learners, usually in small groups.

Most of the research included in the Panel’s review was studies of “reciprocal teaching.” In reciprocal teaching, the teacher first models the comprehension process, showing how s/he interacts with text. Use two or more of the following strategies in combination: question generation, summarization of main ideas, clarification of word meanings or confusing text, and prediction of what will come next in the text. The teacher explains how and when the strategy is used and provides guidance as the learners practice applying the strategies in working through a passage. The readers gradually become independent in using the strategies.

8. Cooperative Learning

Choose any of the comprehension monitoring strategies. Begin by introducing and modeling the strategy. Provide individual practice with monitoring and feedback. Pair or group them for cooperative learning.

Comprehension Strategy Instruction Tips in a Nutshell

- _ Provide instruction in comprehension strategies for learners at all readings levels.
- _ Teach learners how and when to use several broadly applicable, research-based strategies.
- _ Teach strategies explicitly, explaining what to do, and how and when to apply the strategies.
- _ Teach strategies one at a time, providing plenty of opportunities for guided practice to ensure learners can use them independently.
- _ Model the strategies for learners by thinking aloud as you read.
- _ Consider applying the comprehension strategies to listening comprehension, especially when working with weaker readers: read text aloud or use taped readings.
- _ Consider readability level and learners’ background knowledge when choosing texts for comprehension-strategy instruction.
- _ Because coding, fluency, and vocabulary are required for comprehension, include instruction/practice in all appropriate components in reading lessons.

Planning Reading Instruction for Adults

Instructional planning involves both content and process. The content of a reading activity or lesson is determined by the reading-component needs of individuals and groups. The process of instruction involves general instructional principles.

The practices described below are based on the existing evidence-based research and offer helpful guidance. Begin with these proven approaches and, where science has not yet answered questions about adult literacy instruction, use your professional wisdom to adapt them for your students.

The research reviews predominantly featured references to sequencing of tasks, the need for explanation, modeling, and guided practice, and the importance of multiple practice opportunities.

Principles of Effective Instruction

Many of these features of effective instruction are represented in the following models or general approaches.

1. Explicit or direct instruction

There are three features of this approach.

Teachers using explicit instruction make goals, objectives and expectations explicit.

They make instructional content explicit.

They make the structure of the lesson presentation explicit.

2. Strategy instruction

Strategy instruction aims to teach learners how to learn effectively, by applying principles, rules, or multi-step processes to solve problems or accomplish learning tasks. Examples of strategies include phonics rules, ways to monitor comprehension, procedures for decoding multi-syllabic words, tips for using context clues to define words and test-taking strategies.

In teaching strategies, you model your thought processes, demonstrating when and how to use the strategy and then prompting or cueing learners, as needed, when it is appropriate for them to use a strategy that has been taught.

3. Scaffolded instruction

Scaffolded instruction is the process of supporting learners in various ways as they learn, and gradually withdrawing supports as they become capable of independent performance of a task or skill. Supports include clues, clarifying questions, reminders, encouragement, breaking the problem down into steps, “or anything else that allows the student to grow in independence.”

4. Intensive instruction

The two elements of intensive instruction are active learning and time on task. Students learn more when they are active, that is, not just listening or watching, but applying “focused, sustained effort on the content or task.” For example, they might be using a decoding strategy on an unfamiliar word, practicing sight words with flash cards, participating in a discussion about a text, working to solve a comprehension problem, or creating a “map” or other graphic organizer. They learn more when they spend more time engaged in such activities.

5. Structured/segmented instruction

Structured instruction has been defined as the act of “systematically teaching information that has been chunked into manageable pieces.” Complex skills or large bodies of information are broken into parts, which are taught systematically according to a planned sequence. An approach that is described similarly has been termed “segmentation.” You must analyze each task and break it into its component parts, and then after teaching the parts systematically, bring them back together so learners are aware of the process or concept as a whole.