VI. Evidence Based Research: Individualized Instructional Goal Lesson Planning

When developing reading programs to support struggling readers, one must think first at why the student struggles. What element of reading are they missing? Can they read accurately but with an appropriate pace? Or do they have rate and accuracy solid, but do not understand the meaning of the passages they read? But what most teachers and researchers struggle with is why there are any difficulties at all? What disconnects occurs and when does it occur that stumps a student’s reading ability. If we can be preemptive for reading difficulties, couldn’t we prevent them before they happen? Baddeleys’ Model suggest that students who struggle to read do not develop working memory and central executive functions adequately (1986). Students then cannot remember words or parts of words to build a lexicon for reading. They struggle to attend to words as they are reading. This leads to the delay in building a foundation of words the student automatically recognizes. Automacy in word recognition is the building blocks for word knowledge and fluency.

The current research agrees that fluency is a vital element of reading. In fact, a fluent reader is often a confident reader and enjoys reading. Mercer and Lane summarize the field’s definition of fluency in their article, “Effects of a Reading Fluency Intervention for Middle Schoolers with Specific Learning Disabilities” to incorporate both accuracy and rate (2002). This is true for all readers, not just students with identified reading disabilities. The importance of rate and accuracy in reading in based in the discussion of cognitive load on the reader. The more automatic words are when a person is reading, the less cognitive effort the reader has to use to decode words. This effort can then be directed towards deciphering the meaning from the text and analyzing or evaluating the text thoughtfully.

Another crucial element of reading is vocabulary acquisition. Children come to school with a varying number of words that are embedded into their lexicon. Instruction and academic reading is meant to strengthen this word base and add to it. There are over 500 academic words used frequently throughout a students’ academic career according to Gunning (2014). A student’s ability to internalize these words enables them to better understand the instructional texts that are provide for them. The more readily a student applies morphemic meaning to words, the deeper the ability to understand the text. It is only with deep understanding of text can a student fully participate in critical thinking skills autonomously. When this process is not autonomous, a reader struggles to understand what they are reading. Comprehension falters and supports are required.

Comprehension of text flows concurrently with acquisition of vocabulary to read successfully. A person can be very fluent with words, but not understand the meaning of the passage they read. Manset-Williamson and Nelson discuss this pitfall that many instructors see with older readers who struggle to read (2005). Focusing only on word knowledge or vocabulary leaves room for a student to leave a student without the necessary skills to be a successful reader. They must be able to comprehend the material they are reading. However, struggling readers do not always know what things good readers do so they can understand what they read (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). There must be explicit instruction for comprehension strategies to support this element of reading for students. Teachers should model each strategy out loud and then provide guided instruction before expecting students to implement any strategy independently.

A balanced literacy program is imperative to proactively circumvent strengthening only one portion of a students’ reading ability. Literacy plans must incorporate all elements of reading: fluency, word knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each lesson should address the instructional goals in each area for the student; thereby strengthen reading as a whole by strengthening the parts of reading. In a sense a balanced literacy reading program is a part-to-whole instructional design.

Works Citied

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