ORGANIZING LITERACY CLASSROOMS FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

A Survival Guide

D. Ray Reutzel ■ Sarah Clark

Classroom teachers are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. They are passionate and committed individuals who truly want to make a difference in the lives of their students. Many novice teachers enter the field of teaching with wide-eyed optimism, only to have their idealism dashed upon the cold, wet rocky shoreline of classroom management and organizational realities. A good many novice teachers, especially the highly academically qualified, leave the profession within the first five years for a variety of reasons, but one is most certainly unresolved concerns and struggles in organizing and managing a classroom (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Morrow, Reutzel, & Casey, 2006).

We wrote this article in the hope that we could help beginning teachers get off to a good start in organizing and managing an effective literacy instruction classroom environment. Organizing an effective literacy classroom begins long before the school year begins. Those who wait until the week before school starts are headed for a rough start. We organized our article in a question–answer format, hoping to anticipate many of the questions that novice teachers have about organizing and managing effective classroom literacy environments, including planning (1) the classroom environment and management, (2) assessment, (3) instruction, (4) parent and community involvement efforts, and (5) personal growth and continued professional development.

Question 1: What Do I Do to Organize My Physical Classroom Environment to Support Literacy Instruction?

The physical arrangement and organization of an effective literacy classroom can be a powerful tool in support of or an unintended impediment to effective literacy instruction (Morrow, Reutzel,

D. Ray Reutzel is the Emma Eccles Jones Endowed Chair Professor of Early Childhood Literacy Education at Utah State University, Logan, USA; e-mail ray.reutzel@usu.edu.

Sarah Clark is an assistant professor of Elementary Education at Utah State University, Logan, USA; e-mail sarah.clark@usu.edu.

& Casey, 2006; Reutzel, Jones, & Newman, 2010; Reutzel & Morrow, 2007; Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004). Get started by obtaining access to your classroom several months before the first day of school. One of the first things to be done is to take inventory of the supplies, furnishings, literacy instructional materials (e.g., core and supplemental reading program teacher's editions), trade books, and technology available in your classroom. Next, measure the size of your classroom. Then draw a "to scale" floor plan of your classroom on graph paper or on the computer. You can experiment with different physical arrangements of your classroom using this floor plan.

Take digital pictures of the classroom walls. Do this to determine areas for future classroom displays, such as instructional charts, classroom procedures, student work, daily schedule, and so forth. Once you have completed an initial physical inventory of the classroom and arranged the furnishings and supplies you have available, make a list of furnishings and instructional materials you need. Take this list to your principal to discuss. Remember, because principals want to make a good first impression, they are typically most willing to spend money to support a new teacher, so use this to your advantage!

Small-group reading instruction is part of an effective literacy program (Mathes et al., 2005; Torgesen, Rashotte, Alexander, Alexander, & MacPhee, 2003; Tyner, 2009; Tyner & Green, 2005). To offer small-group reading instruction, you will need to obtain, if you don't already have these, a U-shaped table, student chairs, a teacher chair, and a rolling cart to organize necessary instructional materials to be near where you will teach the small group.

The hub of an effective literacy classroom is the classroom library (Reutzel & Fawson, 2002). The classroom library is not just for free time reading, but is a rich resource integrated into daily literacy instruction and practice as a place for peer-assisted or independent reading and for storing a variety of engaging reading materials. Consequently, you will need to plan adequate space for a classroom library. Organize the classroom library into a quiet, peaceful area with comfortable seating. Clearly mark library shelves and book tubs so that students can easily locate interesting books, text genres, and appropriate book levels. Book tubs can be labeled by genre with a variety of color-coded levels stored within each genre tub (see Figure 1).

You can obtain free wooden paint stir sticks at a local home hardware or paint store. Students can put their names on these and use them as placeholders for books checked out of the classroom library. Vinyl rain gutter(s) can be mounted on bookshelves or windowsills to display book covers, increasing student interest (Reutzel & Gali, 1998). Ten books per student or 250–300 books total are recommended as a minimum for an elementary classroom library (Reutzel & Fawson, 2002; Stoodt, 1989).

Trade books or children's literature books for the classroom library should vary in terms of content and genre and be leveled by difficulty. One of the most widely recognized book-leveling approaches is called Lexiles (see www.lexile.com). The Lexile system levels books from preprimer levels (–200L to +200L) to graduate school (1400L–1800L) (Stenner, 1996; Stenner & Burdick, 1997). Some educators advocate the occasional use of decodable books for beginning readers (Adams, 1990a, 1990b; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998;

Figure 1   Exemplary Classroom Library Organization

"Wall displays are most effective when students and teachers coproduce these. Consequently, classroom wall spaces need not be filled on the first day of school."

Lyon, 1998), although there are those who question this recommendation (Allington, 1997).

Acquiring an adequate trade book collection for the classroom library is accomplished over a long period of time. Books are often teacher purchased at garage sales or at sheltered workshop stores such as *Goodwill Industries International*. Donations from parents and other community organizations are another source for acquiring trade books for a classroom library. Teachers can also use book points given by publishers when students order books as a class. Obtaining a grant from local businesses or charitable foundations can be another means for acquiring trade books. Occasionally, state or school funds are available to purchase trade books for the classroom library. These few organizational hints will help you begin to organize your classroom library for optimal student use.

A whole-class teaching area is where students will spend a good deal of time during the school day. It should be located near whiteboards, easels, and computer projector screens and well away from designated small-group areas in the classroom. A large piece of carpet, referred to often as the *rug*, may be used to comfortably seat the entire class of children. Arranging desks or tables in a U shape around the rug provides students with floor and table/desk seating options.

Wall displays are most effective when students and teachers coproduce these. Consequently, classroom wall spaces need not be filled on the first day of school. Displays necessary to begin the school year include classroom rules, calendar, lunch menu, routines, daily schedule, helpers, and general information such as numbers, colors, and alphabet letters. Remember, all displays should be neatly produced to set the standard for high-quality work in the classroom.

Every classroom needs well-organized storage. For example, design a central writing storage area complete with author's writing and publishing supplies. Small plastic baskets or bins properly labeled can be used for storage of writing materials and can do much to ease the cleanup and overall organization of this area. Similarly, reference materials such as dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, and almanacs can also be stored in or near the writing storage area in the classroom.

Books not shelved in the classroom library can be placed in covered shelves or cupboards. These books can be brought out at various times during the year to give needed variety to the classroom library. Many other books and reading instruction materials are now available digitally or online. Consequently, you will also need to plan an area for using computers and storing software, CDs, DVDs, and so forth in connection with your classroom library and instructional materials storage areas.

After planning the spaces necessary for an effective classroom literacy environment, it is time to make a plan for how to train students to engage productively in a well-provisioned, organized, and print-rich classroom. Allowing children to engage with all of the literacy spaces and materials at the beginning of the school year is an invitation for disaster. Wait until you have had a few weeks to train students explicitly on how to use these spaces and materials! To begin training, spend about 10 minutes each day over several weeks explaining expectations, setting limits, and modeling procedures for using each literacy learning area.

During the first week of school, label the literacy spaces and materials around the classroom as *closed* or *under construction*. (We have even used yellow crime scene plastic tape for this purpose. It really gets the students' attention!) Focus your time during the first week on getting to know the students and building a learning community. By the second week of the school year, mention to the students that within a few weeks they will be working more often in the literacy spaces set up around the classroom, but before they can do so there is much to be learned. Take a few minutes each day to explain to students what each literacy space is intended to accomplish.

In the third week, select one or two literacy classroom spaces to explain and model. For example, model how students are to enter the classroom library. Model how a team leader, appointed by the teacher, will lead the group in

reading aloud the rules and directions displayed in the classroom library. Model how students are to seat themselves comfortably to read alone or with a partner. Discuss expectations that assigned daily tasks in the classroom library will be completed in the time allotted. Explain the displayed consequences for failure to follow directions and obey the rules.

Last, model the cleanup process of the classroom library. This may involve ringing a bell or some other signaling device to alert students' attention that time for activity has ended. Model how to freeze quietly in place to listen for directions. Then when another signal is given, students have 15–30 seconds to tidy up their literacy area. A final signal alerts them when they are to move to another classroom literacy space or return to their assigned seats. This training process is repeated at a slightly accelerated pace over the next several weeks until all classroom literacy spaces have been explained, modeled, and role-played.

Role-playing the use of the literacy spaces and materials around the classroom is a critical final step. During role-play, any student who fails to follow directions causes the group to stop and repractice the expected procedure. Remaining firm about meeting expectations as children role-play their use of these literacy spaces and materials will save many management problems later.

Of course, as students role-play, they are becoming more excited, anxious, and motivated to use these literacy spaces. Digital photographs of students properly engaged in the various learning spaces are helpful as a reminder for students. Train students to move efficiently into and out of various classroom literacy spaces between activities. Use timers or stopwatches to motivate students to accomplish tasks briskly. A worthwhile goal is to reduce transition times to a single minute so that the bulk of classroom time is spent on reading and writing.

Question 2: What Do I Do to Develop an Effective Classroom Management Plan?

Of all concerns novice teachers have about setting up a classroom of their own, classroom management is typically top of the list. Gunning (2010) described effectively managed classrooms as those where there is purpose and order, an expectation of high student effort and engagement, a balance of cooperation and competition, and students who are trained to be independent and capable learners. An effective teacher uses time wisely and is well prepared to teach (Gunning, 2010; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Ruddell, 1995). Furthermore, effective teachers understand Vygotsky's (1986) zone of proximal development so that students receive appropriate scaffolding and challenge during daily instruction. Your ability to manage the daily schedule, classroom transitions, and student behavior can make or break your success as a teacher.

Here are some classroom management tips to consider. First, clearly state and model the expected behaviors you have for students on the first day of school. Discuss the rules and the consequences for failing

to obey the rules with the students. Do not fall into the trap of asking students to suggest the rules. You are the teacher and are responsible to maintain order and a positive learning environment. They can ask questions for clarification, but they do not create the rules for behavior in the school or classroom. Classroom rules and expectations should also be shared with the parents. Once the rules and consequences have been established, it is important for you to be consistent in applying them.

Second, classroom management involves managing time and transitions efficiently. Use your time wisely and engage students in meaningful learning activities. Students are quick to identify activities with little meaning or purpose and often demonstrate this by acting out or being disruptive. Another key to keeping the classroom running smoothly is to manage the transitions from one activity to the next, as described earlier.

Third, and probably most concerning, is managing student misbehaviors. With clear expectations modeled and taught, you will prevent many common student disruptions and inappropriate behavior. When students misbehave or

> *"When children enter the classroom, they should have a series of tasks that are to be accomplished immediately."*

are disruptive, finds ways to administer consequences to minimize interruptions to your instruction. This could mean simply telling a student to replace a green with a yellow card on your classroom management chart. A prepared teacher is a teacher who can respond to student misbehavior calmly and confidently and maintain the flow of classroom instruction. Predetermined rules and consequences, clear classroom routines, and brief transitions will ensure that all students can learn in a safe and comfortable environment.

Question 3: How Do I Plan to Get Each Day Started Efficiently?

Several years ago, we observed a randomly selected group of elementary teachers during their entire literacy block. What struck us as observers was how long teachers took to get into instruction from the start of the school day. In one classroom, an extreme to be sure, it took 45 minutes of opening activities before any instruction was begun.

The daily opening routine in classrooms is intended to get the necessary work of administration and organization done quickly and efficiently. Typically, teachers need to accommodate the following daily tasks: (1) taking attendance, (2) getting a lunch count, (3) school announcements and pledge of allegiance, and (4) reviewing the calendar and daily schedule.

In addition, many teachers have now incorporated into the daily or morning routine a *morning message*. Although each of these demands are important to the smooth operation of a school, they can take precious time away from the more vital work of instruction generally and literacy instruction specifically. Consequently, it is important to organize the daily or morning routine as efficiently as possible, preserving every precious minute of allocated in-school time to the essential work of literacy teaching and learning.

When children enter the classroom, they should have a series of tasks that are to be accomplished immediately. Many teachers have an attendance board where students can turn their name around on a hanging decal or in a pocket chart to indicate they are in attendance. This saves time calling roll and gives the teacher quick attendance information in a single location. Similarly, a lunch count board can indicate the number of students who are planning to eat school lunch each day. Once these necessary tasks are done, students may be encouraged to read the morning message clearly posted in a classroom location.

A morning message is typically displayed, read, and discussed as a kick off to the day. A morning message provides a time for students to think about what is going to be happening during the school day, reflect on an important event from the day before, or discuss a meaningful upcoming event.

This can be displayed digitally or using static print displays.

Once students have completed these opening activities, some teachers have a menu of useful activities students can complete, such as reading a book independently or with a partner, writing in a journal, or completing a word sort. These activities are sometimes referred to as "bell work," meaning work that is to be done right after the bell rings marking the beginning of the school day and completed by the time the teacher is ready to begin instruction.

Question 4: How Might I Plan to Effectively Collect, Manage, and Analyze Student Assessment Data?

One of the most important things you can do as a novice literacy teacher is to get acquainted with the district, state, and core reading program's assessments that are used to screen, progress monitor, and measure student achievement outcomes. Almost all core reading instruction programs include unit or end-of-theme assessments for determining the degree to which students have learned the skills, strategies, and concepts taught in the preceding unit or theme. These assessments are generally informal and are often criterion-referenced or tied to the scope and sequence of skills taught in the core reading program. School districts often monitor student scores using these informal assessments. You may be asked to enter these scores into a school or district database.

In addition to the core reading program assessments, many districts use progress-monitoring assessments such as curriculum-based measurement. These assessments typically are short, one to two minutes, during which students read a text at their instructional

level or grade level, and notations are made about the types of errors (miscues) student make from the printed text. These progress-monitoring assessments are given more frequently to struggling students to determine whether they are making growth in their ability to read more complex and difficult text levels and types (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008).

Finally, school districts are often required to give outcome assessments to determine student reading growth and achievement over a specified period of time, usually a school year. These outcome assessments are most often one of two types: (1) state tests such as the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test, or (2) nationally published, norm-referenced reading achievement tests such as the Stanford Achievement Test or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Nearly every state has developed a criterion-referenced curriculum assessment of the state's reading/literacy core curriculum. These assessments are important to learn about because they are most often used to determine whether a school is meeting the requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under federal law. If a school fails to meet AYP, it falls into a sanctioned category in which the school can be taken over by the state and reorganized, losing principal and teachers.

Nationally published norm-referenced tests, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress, are also used as outcome assessments to compare reading achievement of states, school districts, and schools nationally and within a state. Congressional representatives, state legislators, and school administrators use these outcome measures to make public policy, determine funding, and make administrative decisions. Consequently, they are of central importance to the life of a teacher,

even though they offer little useful information to inform teachers' day-to-day instructional decisions.

As a novice teacher, be sure to request information about assessment scheduling throughout the year. Which screening assessments will be given and when? Which progress-monitoring assessments are used in your school, and how often are they to be administered to students? Finally, find out which outcome assessments are used and when are they administered. Does your state require a state test? Does the state also require national assessments to be given at specific grade levels (e.g., 3rd, 5th, 8th, or 11th)?

As a part of planning for your first year as a teacher, you need to develop an assessment plan that contains four things: (1) a calendar, (2) a computer database spreadsheet, (3) a system for collecting informal data on student performance daily, and (4) a collection of assessments you can use to make quick in-class diagnoses or checks on student performance.

After making a list of district, state, and other tests mandated in your school and making a notation of when and how often these are to be administered, place testing dates on an annual school year assessment calendar. Second, using a computer spreadsheet, make an annual assessment record sheet with all of the assessments and dates listed across the top of the spreadsheet and the students' names down the far left-hand side. This will allow you to keep all of your assessment data handy for needed student analyses.

Third, determine other informal means that you will use to collect data on students during the day. For example, some teachers use a small pad of sticky notes on which they can write down what they observe daily. Others use a clipboard with a blank matrix

on which they can write the concepts, skills, or strategies taught across the top and student names down the left-hand side. During the day, teachers can place a check mark by the names of students in the skills, strategies, or concepts column of the matrix when a need for additional instruction or guided practice is observed.

Finally, collect a group of informal assessments to probe student's performance on specific reading or literacy skills, such as a list of sight words, decodable words on cards, interest inventories, motivation questionnaires, and so on. It is also a good idea to develop a "child observation or kid watching" schedule so that you are sure to observe every child on a regular basis and not just those who draw attention to themselves.

Question 5: How Might I Design an Effective Daily Literacy Instructional Block Schedule?

The first step in setting up a daily schedule is to determine which specific subjects you are assigned to teach. In most circumstances, classroom teachers are assigned to teach mathematics, social studies, science, and the English language arts. The subjects of music, art, computers and technology, or physical education may be taught by the classroom teacher or by specialists. Verify

"As a novice teacher, be sure to request information about assessment scheduling throughout the year."

with your principal the subjects for which you are responsible, as this will help you determine the amount of time you should allocate for each subject in your daily schedule.

Research has clearly demonstrated that the more time students spend on task, and the more content they experience, the more they learn (Brophy & Good, 1986; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1984). As the teacher, you set the stage for the amount and type of learning that occurs daily in your classroom. Establish a daily schedule on the first day of school. Although variety is the spice of life, it is not the staple. It is comforting for students when the daily instructional routine is familiar and they know what to expect (Doyle, 2006; Holdaway, 1984).

Daily reading instruction routines should include reading *to* children, reading *with* children, and reading *by* children (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011). Shanahan (2004) recommended that teachers spend a minimum of 120 total minutes of reading instruction in a literacy block. This 120-minute literacy block can be divided into four segments: word work, writing, fluency, and vocabulary/comprehension strategy instruction. We provide a daily schedule in Figure 2. Within this daily schedule is a 120-minute literacy block divided into four blocks, one for each segment, of 30 minutes each.

The first 30-minute reading instruction block is for *word work*. It is intended to help students build letter name/sound knowledge, recognize and decode words, understand the structure and meaning of words, spell words, hear the sounds of spoken words, and explore concepts of print.

The next 30-minute block of whole-group explicit instruction, *writing*, is intended to teach core elements of the writing curriculum. In this block cognitive writing strategies, the writing

Figure 2	Daily Schedule With 120-Minute Literacy Block
8:30 a.m.:	School Day Opening: Morning Message, Roll, Lunch, Weather, Bell Work
8:45 a.m.:	Word Work: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Spelling
9:15 a.m.:	Writing: Strategy Instruction and Writer's Workshop
9:45 a.m.:	Vocabulary and Comprehension Strategy Instruction (Focus on Core Reading Program and Content Area Literacy)
10:15 a.m.:	Recess
10:30 a.m.:	Fluency Instruction and Practice
11:00 a.m.:	Small Group Instruction (Language Arts and Math)
Noon:	LUNCH
12:45 p.m.:	Math Instruction
1:45 p.m.:	Recess/P.E.
2:00 p.m.:	Science (M, W) Social Studies (T, TH) Arts (F).
3:00 p.m.:	Clean Up and Dismiss at 3:10 p.m.

processes, and writing conventions including grammar are taught. Teachers should also allow time for students to explore various types or formats of writing, as well as engage in a variety of writing tasks.

Fluency, the next 30-minute block, can be done using whole- or small-group instruction. During this block, demonstrate and model various aspects of reading fluency, including accuracy, rate, and prosody. Fluency activities may include reader's theater, radio reading, choral reading, buddy or peer-assisted reading, scaffolded independent reading, repeated reading, wide reading, and individual fluency assessment conferences (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010).

The final 30-minute block is dedicated to *comprehension strategy instruction*. During this literacy block, teachers model and demonstrate the use of evidence-based comprehension strategies such as answering questions,

using text structure, or using graphic organizers.

All these literacy processes and concepts in the four blocks just described, as well as in Tier 2 instruction (described in Question #6), should be taught with explicit instruction, whether offered in small- or whole-group settings (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011). Explicit instruction is not to be confused with scripted or direct instruction programs. Rather, explicit instruction involves four interlocking elements of effective, unambiguous instruction: (1) explanation of the lesson objectives and purpose, (2) teacher modeling of how to use a strategy or acquire an unknown concept, (3) teacher-guided practice with scaffolding or support, and (4) independent practice.

1. Explanation—Clearly explain the reading objective or skill to be taught, or the "what" taught. Then explain the purpose, or the "why" this skill is important, and "where" it will be useful (Duffy, 2003). Be sure to use "kid speak" so children can understand the objective or skill at their level.

2. Teacher modeling—Model how to implement the skill or strategy in multiple texts and use "think alouds" to help students understand what is going inside your head as you demonstrate the skill or strategy (Duffy, 2003; Hancock, 1999). Model the implementation of the skill or strategy exactly as you want students to do it. This may be the only time students see the skill or strategy modeled explicitly.

3. Teacher-guided practice—During teacher-guided practice, repeat modeling the same skill or strategy but allow students a chance to join in and share in parts of the implementation of the skill or strategy. You are there to provide scaffolding and guidance, if needed,

for students. Scaffolds may include the use of easier texts, graphic organizers, or strategy charts on the walls on which the steps and sequence to implement the skill or strategy effectively are posted. Emphasize the active use of the strategy or skill. Gradually release responsibility for implemented parts of the strategy or skill from teacher to student (Duffy, 2003; Hancock, 1999). Provide multiple opportunities for practice.

4. Independent practice—Now is the time for students to implement the strategy or skill independently, with you observing. This is a good time to ask questions to ensure students have mastered the skill or strategy. Questions such as "How do you remember that this letter makes this sound?" or "I noticed that you grouped all of these words together. Can you tell me why you did that?" allow opportunities for students to demonstrate their independent skill or strategy application. These types of questions help you to understand what students understand or why they may be a bit unclear or uncertain.

Once you have established a daily schedule and routine, post the schedule so that it is accessible and visible by all. Remain flexible, as there will inevitably be interruptions to your daily instructional routine and schedule. Next, effective teachers plan to differentiate their instruction to meet the diverse needs of the individual students in their classrooms. One popular way to accomplish this differentiation of instruction is the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) models that are growing rapidly in popularity.

When using RTI models to differentiate classroom literacy instruction, the types of instruction provided are parsed into three tiers, Tiers 1, 2, and 3. Preparing to effectively teach the core reading program or Tier 1 instruction in your classroom should be one of your highest priorities. All students in the class receive Tier 1 or core reading instructional grade level (Taylor, 2008).

Three steps will help you effectively organize Tier 1 or core reading instruction. First, become familiar with the national or state core curriculum articulated by the state in which you teach. Each grade level has

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unique objectives and skills to master. What benchmark skills are the students in your grade level expected to know and do by the end of the year? What skills should they already know? Do not neglect this step. Understanding where your students are now and where they need to be at the end of the year is very important in planning instruction for the school year.

Second, become familiar with the specific core reading program and other supplemental literacy instructional resources adopted by your school or district. How do the objectives in the core reading program correspond with the standards, objectives, and indicators of the state's core curriculum? Align your core reading program skills to be taught with the state standards in the location where you teach. Map out the scope and sequence of skills, concepts, and

strategies to be taught in the reading program for the entire year.

Next, break it down further into months, weeks, and days. What are the units of study? How should these units of study be sequenced throughout the year to achieve appropriate pacing and coverage? What is the core reading program's routine for weekly instruction? What is the design of the daily lessons? Determine how you will organize daily instruction to include the essential components of literacy instruction and cover the standards, objectives, skills, and strategies expected in your school, district, and state.

You are responsible for making informed decisions about the literacy instruction students receive. You will also find that the school or district's adopted core reading program provides many more resources than you can possibly use in one day or week. Select from these resource materials judiciously. Furthermore, ensure that the core reading program materials and activities you select align with the evidence found in research, state standards, and core curriculum elements.

Third, become familiar with the technology tools available in your core reading program. Many programs have a technology component built right into the program. Additionally, the Internet provides a wide variety of websites with games and activities for students to practice literacy skills, as well as online books and materials to extend the classroom library. Demonstrate how to use the many and varied technology tools that are available to aid students' learning and to shore up their reading and writing skills. Plan for daily technology experiences in your lesson plans. Never forget that you are teaching the digital generation!

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Question 6: How Do I Plan to Offer Effective Tier 2, Small-Group Reading Instruction?

When using RTI models, all students are initially screened to determine whether they are making adequate progress toward achieving established literacy learning standards. Students who are shown in initial screenings to be lagging behind receive specially targeted evidence-based interventions to fill in their skill gaps as quickly as possible. Regular progress-monitoring assessment is used to determine the success of Tier 2 interventions with students. If Tier 2 instructional intervention fails to accelerate or positively affect a student's performance, then Tier 3 evidence-based interventions are implemented.

The responsibility for designing, documenting, and coordinating effective Tier 2 literacy instruction in the classroom rests with the classroom teacher. Tier 2 literacy instruction is intended to assist those students who are not making adequate progress in Tier 1 or core reading instruction. To begin, work together with a team of grade-level teaching peers, other specialized teachers such as special education and Title I teachers, and your school literacy coach to analyze screening data obtained from assessment administrations given at the beginning of the school year. Also examine data obtained during Tier 1 reading instruction to determine each student's needs. Then develop an intervention plan for each student in your class.

In Tier 2 literacy instruction, students are provided increasingly intensive instruction as indicated on a variety of assessments. Intensity of instruction in small groups can be varied to include group size, frequency, time, and duration of interventions. Tier 2 literacy instruction that involves other providers such as reading specialists, tutors, or classroom aides should be carefully aligned with the scope and sequence of skills and the academic language used in Tier 1 core classroom literacy instruction. Alignment of Tier 2 literacy instruction with Tier 1 core classroom instruction has been shown recently to significantly and positively affect literacy growth among at-risk students (Wonder-McDowell, Reutzel, & Smith, in press).

How are Tier 2 reading instruction small groups formed? After looking at students' screening and classroom performance data from the first few weeks of school, student profiles should be developed to determine (a) reading levels, and (b) areas of strength and weakness in student literacy skills, strategies, concepts, and motivation. Estimate the range of reading grade levels typically found in a classroom by taking the grade level and multiplying it by 1.5. For example, if you teach third grade × 1.5 there would be 4.5 grade levels of reading abilities within your classroom or a range from first to fifth grades. This information is important to know to have the range of books needed in the classroom to meet the demands of Tier 2 literacy instruction.

Next, study the progress monitoring and screening literacy test data to determine where students evidence gaps in their literacy skill, strategy, and concept development, as well as their levels of motivation. All these data must be carefully studied, often in data study groups facilitated by an experienced reading coach, to determine related clusters of student needs. Once these related clusters of needs are identified, students can be grouped together for Tier 2 small-group reading instruction uniquely focused on filling the identified gaps.

Many teachers believe they are meeting students' needs for Tier 2 reading instruction when placing students into small groups in which they read "instructional-level texts," or those texts they can read with 90–94% accuracy. The lesson routines in these small groups often follow the same routine, failing to address other aspects of students' reading instructional needs. Thus simply changing text levels but not the content of the instructional routines in small-group reading instruction is not what is intended in Tier 2 literacy instruction. Students need to receive specific instruction focused on identified skills, strategies, and conceptual gaps, along with extensive teacher-guided practice, gradually released over time, and guided application of these skills, strategies, and concepts when reading and writing real texts.

Every Tier 2 literacy lesson should be sure to stress the application of literacy skills, strategies, and concepts in the act of reading and writing. Each Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction lesson should develop a unique

routine of instruction, practice, and application suited to the needs of the group members. Thus it will be infrequent for two Tier 2 small-group lessons to look the same. For example, a group of students who do not know high-frequency sight words but are good decoders may engage in a strategy for committing sight words to memory or reading and writing texts that require frequent recognition of sight words. Each small Tier 2 reading group receives instruction targeted to fill gaps or accelerate students' progress in literacy.

Because Tier 2 literacy instruction is typically provided in small-group settings, you will be faced with the question of what the other children in the class will be doing when you are in small-group literacy instruction (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tyner, 2009; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). As a consequence, you will need to plan productive work for those students who are not participating in small-group literacy instruction. To accomplish this aim, you have several options to consider, including (1) a menu of assigned whole-class activities, (2) a menu of assigned independent activities, or (3) the use of learning centers. Whatever your choice, do not feel compelled to begin the year offering Tier 2 literacy instruction! You will not have sufficient student data collected to plan Tier 2 literacy instruction for several weeks into the year.

If you choose option 1, *whole-class assigned activities*, you will need to have clear procedures established, materials prepared, and classroom helpers designated to pass out necessary materials for completing assigned activities. You will also need a timer to signal the end of time blocks allocated to complete each assigned activity. Many teachers set up their classroom computers with the title

and directions of the assigned activity to be completed along with a countdown clock projected onto a screen to keep students engaged.

Whole-class assigned activities may include such things as buddy reading, word sorts, writing, spelling, or other independent practice. Whatever activities are assigned to the whole class, the procedures must be well taught, and the assigned literacy concepts, strategies, or skills must have been previously taught with sufficient guided practice so that they can be completed independently or with the help of a peer.

If option 2 is chosen, *a menu of assigned activities to be completed independently*, what was said about option number 1 applies here as well. In addition, create a menu of assigned activities students will need to complete within a specified time frame, such as in two days or by the end of the week. Each student is given the opportunity to work through the menu, completing assigned activities at his or her own pace. Students must complete all the assigned activities on the menu by the established due date or deadline.

If students complete the entire menu before the deadline or due date, another menu of optional activities is displayed that students can complete. These optional activities may include any number of literacy activities, but they should focus on extending practice for essential literacy skills, concepts, and strategies students have previously learned and for which they need continued independent practice, including reading and writing a wide variety of texts.

If option 3 is chosen, *learning centers*, there are several important decisions to be made before doing so. Consider how many learning centers you can reasonably create and manage while simultaneously providing a small

group of students with Tier 2 supplemental literacy instruction. For the novice teacher, managing the complexities of multiple literacy centers may seem too much! If so, ease into the use of literacy centers gradually. Begin by creating one literacy center, perhaps the classroom library for paired or independent reading, and then use this center with option 1 or 2 as described previously. There are several key features associated with effective literacy centers:

- Center materials or activities should seldom if ever represent new or novel learning experiences.

- Center materials or activities should provide students with independent practice of the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction—writing, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and word work.

- Seatwork activities or participation in easy, repetitious games do not represent the most effective use of classroom independent practice time.

- Center materials or activities should engage students in applying their literacy skills in reading and writing of texts or interacting around a discussion of texts.

- Center materials or activities must contain well-defined and structured assignments that require accountability.

- Literacy learning objectives, standards, or benchmarks; rules or behavior expected; and directions for completing assignments must be clearly displayed.

- Literacy centers need to be well supplied and explicitly organized into clearly marked or labeled containers, bins, or shelves to be easily accessed and put away by students.

- Center materials or activities should be added to, deleted from, and rotated on a regular basis to add occasional variety.
- Ready-made, effective, free, and easily produced literacy center activities can be found at the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) website (www.fcrr.org/curriculum/SCAindex.shtm).

Remember, if you fail to state center behavioral expectations, give clear directions for completing assignments, and hold students accountable for the time spent in literacy centers, you will find that students do not consistently make good use of independent practice opportunities. As described previously in this article, procedures for training students to use literacy centers need to be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced under the guidance of the teacher.

Question 7: How Do I Plan the First Week of Reading Lessons?

Spend the first day of school helping students feel comfortable in their new surroundings and learn the daily schedule. Allow time for you to get to know student reading abilities and needs. The first week should be spent helping students become familiar with the classroom procedures and protocol and assessing your students' reading abilities and needs. This will help you establish a safe learning environment, and it will help you know where to begin instruction. Once you have gathered background information about your students, you are ready to begin planning daily literacy lessons.

Familiarize yourself with state and national standards (e.g., Common Core State Standards) and the scope and sequence of skills to be taught in the locally adopted core reading program you will be using. Use Shanahan's (2004) four–literacy block model described previously to plan successive days' lessons. Plan ahead one week at a time, reviewing the core reading program's scope and sequence of skills to be taught to ensure you are on track. The scope and sequence chart found in many core reading programs provides an overall plan of which skills are to be taught and at which time during the school year to ensure that all skills and concepts are covered and receive adequate attention.

Research strongly recommends that essential elements of literacy be taught *systematically* and *explicitly* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Systematic instruction essentially means that teachers teach skills, strategies, and concepts using a predetermined schedule and sequence. Explicit lessons are usually taught

within each of the four 30-minute blocks of the overall 120-minute literacy instruction block.

When planning daily instruction, remember to plan *emergency time fillers*. Sometimes the lessons do not take as long as you think and you are left with time on your hands. Emergency time fillers should be useful games or activities to help reinforce skills that are part of the established curriculum or scope and sequence of skills to be taught. Remember that teaching can also occur on the move. Review skills when walking your class to and from locations within the school. Keeping students engaged will make them less prone to act out or disrupt others.

"When planning daily instruction, remember to plan emergency time fillers to help reinforce skills that are part of the scope and sequence of skills."

Question 8: How Can I Plan for Effective Parent Communication and Involvement?

Parents and caregivers are an important part of effective literacy instruction. They can provide

information about their child and help reinforce skills and concepts taught at school. Research demonstrates that when parents and teachers partner together, at-risk student achievement increases (Darling, 2005). Knowing this, communicating on a regular basis with parents should be a high priority. With all the demands in your new role, parent communication and involvement must be carefully and systemically planned.

The primary purpose of communicating with parents is to keep them informed about what is going on in their child's classroom. Communicate about upcoming events (field trips, picture day, lunch menu, etc.), teacher expectations (how many minutes students should be reading each night), and information about the topics or units of study you are teaching (the class is studying dinosaurs, the solar system, etc.). This general information is shared with parents on a regular basis—usually weekly or monthly.

As a novice teacher, it is probably best to begin with monthly parent communication. Once you have your classroom running smoothly, you can communicate more frequently with parents. A variety of formats can be used, including newsletters, notes, e-mails, or classroom blogs. Keep in mind that this regular communication should be quick and easy to plan so it does not demand too much of your time. Use a format—traditional print, visual (DVD), or online—with which you are familiar so you can be consistent in your communication. Also, consider which of these ways of communicating with parents will be most accessible.

A second purpose for communicating with parents is to report how their child is doing in mastering literacy skills and objectives. This is especially

true for students who may be struggling readers. Examples of this type of information sharing include progress-monitoring reports, report cards, and Student Educational Occupation Plans. You may also send home behavior reports so that parents can help mitigate student behaviors that are impeding learning. Praise is just as important as correction, so take opportunities to communicate positively with parents and students.

There are many things parents can do at home to reinforce what you are teaching in class, but parents need to be shown how to help. A note, blog, or DVD can be sent home asking parents to read with their child each night or at least have their children watch captioned TV and read the captions (Koskinen, Wilson, & Jensema, 1985), but bear in mind that there may be situations in which the parent is not able to provide additional support at home.

Parental involvement can be a vital aspect of your classroom. Parents volunteer in their child's classroom for a variety of reasons. Some parents feel a responsibility to provide support to their child and their student's classroom teacher, or they may enjoy working in the classroom so they can see what is expected of their child and how their child performs compared with other students.

Overbearing parents, however, can usurp your authority as a novice teacher, so you will need to plan how you will use parent volunteers. Have projects on hand in case a parent shows up unannounced. Keep in mind that a parent's ability to volunteer in the classroom is not an indication of how much they love and want to support their child. Many parents wish they could spend time in the classroom but are unable to do so because of work, family, or other obligations.

"Join a professional literacy organization such as the International Reading Association and get involved!"

Question 9: How Do I Plan to Continue My Own Professional Growth?

To begin, we recommend that you study the available research on exemplary literacy teachers and make a list of exemplary practices. For primary grades, we recommend *Learning to Read: Lessons From First-Grade Classrooms* (Pressley et al., 2001), and for intermediate grades, *Reading to Learn: Lessons From Exemplary Fourth-Grade Classrooms* (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

Put together a plan to guide your future professional growth as a literacy educator. Join a professional literacy organization such as the International Reading Association at www.reading.org or the National Council of Teachers of English at www.ncte.org. Find a local or state chapter of these organizations and get involved! Professional associations such as these are great places to learn from other teachers and offer a place to get ideas for solving problems in your own classroom.

Also, you might want to join an online discussion group, ning, blog, or other social networking arrangement to learn more about how you can provide students with high-quality literacy instruction. Make it a personal habit

to read professional journals in print or online that provide the latest information about evidence-based literacy instruction, such as *The Reading Teacher*. The Internet is chock full of free information and lessons for effective literacy instruction. Learn about emerging technologies that will affect the teaching of literacy. Take workshops, take classes, and be a learner!

Keep up on educational policymaking and laws. Get involved with a local legislator, not as a complainer, but as a friend and conduit to the inside of educational issues. Legislators need educators who will give them information when they need it and a pat on the back when they do well. Get cards or e-mails so you can communicate ideas, thoughts, information, and kudos quickly to legislators.

Lastly, *read*. Read books outside of education, books that address issues in medicine, business, and the world. Get to know what is going on nationally and globally. Read for fun. Have a book that you read to escape. And last, carry books with you wherever you go. Be a model of someone who loves to read and reads. And remember when talking with students to be sure to regularly talk up and talk about books (or "bless books," as Dr. Linda Gambrell says) so they, too, can learn about books they might want to read!

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Erratum

The Reading Teacher editors and staff regret an error that appeared in the "2. What Research Is" section of "10 Things Every Literacy Educator Should Know About Research" by N.K. Duke and N.M. Martin, 2011, *The Reading Teacher, 65*(1), p. 11. In the third column, sentence beginning "For example, the infamous research on concept-oriented reading instruction…," the word *infamous* is erroneously used. The sentence should read, "For example, the famous research on concept-oriented reading instruction, or CORI, began as a collaboration between researchers at the University of Maryland and teachers in public elementary schools in Prince George's County, Maryland (e.g., Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004)."