

# Using the Interactive Strategies Approach to Prevent Reading Difficulties in an RTI Context

*Donna M. Scanlon*

Michigan State University

*Kimberly L. Anderson*

University at Albany, State University of New York

People vary tremendously in the ease with which they acquire academic and other skills. Teachers vary tremendously in their effectiveness in teaching various content areas and in their ability to effectively respond to various student characteristics (e.g., age, temperament, gender). The complex interactions between and among the student and teacher characteristics, as well as school, family, and community characteristics, combine to determine the student's academic success. Until recently, students for whom these forces had produced substantially less than optimal academic skill but who were judged to be at least average in their intellectual ability were often identified as learning disabled (LD), which locates the problem within the student and, potentially, signals to those responsible for that student's education (including the student's teachers and parents, and the student) that there may not be much hope for that student.

Indeed, until the last few decades, no serious consideration has been given to the possibility that, for a student with a discrepant profile between achievement and intelligence, the student's experience and instruction might be the locus of the "disability." We now know, however, that instructional experiences have a powerful influence on students' learning trajectories. Particularly with regard to early literacy development, there is a wealth of evidence indicating that, for most students, serious reading difficulties can be prevented by improving the quality, quantity, or intensity of the instruction that is provided.

## The Emergence of RTI

Based on mounting evidence indicating that many students were being inappropriately identified as LD, the United States government passed legislation (Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA]; 2004) that provides schools with the option to do away with the once-required IQ-achievement discrepancy criterion for LD classification and instead use a process in which struggling learners are provided with enhanced and, if need be, intensified instruction for the purpose of preventing long-term learning difficulties and avoiding inappropriate LD classifications. This process has come to be known as the RTI approach. Its basic premise is that a student should not be considered for learning disability designation until it can be documented that the student has received appropriately targeted and intensified instruction and that instruction has failed to accelerate the student's learning to the point where he or she can meet grade-level expectations.

In the years since the IDEIA was passed, a good deal has been written about the RTI process. However, most of the material written for educational practitioners has focused on issues related to documentation of interventions and progress monitoring and on decision making related to that progress. Remarkably little attention has been given to what, in our opinion, is the most important component of RTI: the nature and qualities of the instruction that is offered. Rather, schools are often advised to implement high-quality instructional programs with fidelity. Such recommendations suggest that there is a menu of programs available which, when implemented as intended, will yield demonstrably better outcomes for students. However, this is not the case. There are remarkably few instructional programs that, even when delivered with fidelity, yield achievement outcomes that are better than the outcomes that occur when students are provided with the type of instruction that was already available to them, and in fact, the implementation of some programs has been found to have a negative impact on student learning (see the What Works Clearinghouse website provided by the United States Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, which reviews the evidence on program effectiveness: [ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc)).

Further, the practitioner literature on RTI does not reflect the fact that, regardless of efforts to standardize instruction, teachers using the same instructional program or approach deliver instruction that is variably effective. For example, in a study conducted by Tivnan and Hemphill (2005) in which four distinct instructional programs were implemented in different schools,

the researchers found that the student outcomes were approximately the same across programs. However, within each program they found that the students in some classrooms made much more progress than did students in other classrooms. In other words, there was substantially more variation caused by teacher differences than there was by the instructional program adopted.

Based on this and other studies that have identified what teachers do, rather than which program they use, as the most critical factor in enhancing student learning, we are very concerned about the advice to adopt (commercial) programs and implement them with fidelity. There is simply no research to support this recommendation. Many educators understand the requirement to implement programs with fidelity to mean that instruction should be delivered exactly as prescribed in the program manual. Such an approach to instruction will clearly limit teachers' ability to be responsive to their students' instructional needs and thereby potentially limit the students' learning.

Of even greater concern is the widespread belief that if a student makes inadequate progress in a given instructional program, the student should be placed in a different program. We are aware of at least one local school district where students are ineligible for consideration for LD designation until they have been given a trial in at least three distinct programs. For students who find learning to read confusing and challenging, this program switching has the potential to exacerbate rather than alleviate their difficulties. Thus, although RTI has emerged as a viable means of preventing long-term reading difficulties and reducing the number of students who are inaccurately classified as LD, there is reason to be concerned about the potential long-term impacts of such a process if implemented in such disruptive ways. Indeed, we are concerned that some of the instructional recommendations being made in the name of RTI may ultimately serve to increase the number of students who experience prolonged reading difficulties.

## **RTI and the Interactive Strategies Approach**

Our main purpose in this chapter is to describe an approach to preventing reading difficulties, the Interactive Strategies Approach (ISA; Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2010; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002). The ISA has been developed and tested over the course of several large-scale studies that focused on exploring ways to prevent long-term reading difficulties. The approach has been found to be effective in reducing the number of at-risk students who experience

reading difficulties in the early primary grades. We have found that it is effective when provided by intervention teachers in both one-to-one and small-group contexts (Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney, 2008; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005; Vellutino et al., 1996) and by classroom teachers (Scanlon et al., 2008; Scanlon, Anderson, Gelzheiser, & Vellutino, 2010).

It is important to note that research on the ISA, to a great extent, predates the move to RTI as a vehicle for preventing long-term reading difficulties and determining LD classifications. In fact, the research on the approach is a bit backward relative to the logic of RTI in that our earliest research focused on one-to-one intervention for first-grade struggling readers (Vellutino et al., 1996), which, from an RTI perspective, might be considered to be Tier 3 intervention. Realizing that one-to-one intervention is costly and probably unsustainable on a large scale and that most students probably do not need that level of intensity, our next major study focused on reducing the number of students who struggle with reading in first grade by providing small-group interventions for at-risk kindergartners (Scanlon et al., 2005), similar to a Tier 2 intervention from an RTI perspective. That study revealed that small-group intervention for kindergartners who were at risk of experiencing reading difficulties could substantially reduce the number of students who qualified as struggling readers in first grade. Further, small-group intervention in kindergarten reduced the number of students who demonstrated severe reading difficulties at the end of first grade regardless of the type of intervention they received in first grade.

In our most recent intervention study (Scanlon et al., 2008), we found that teaching classroom teachers about the ISA and supporting their implementation of it was also effective in reducing the number of students who qualified as struggling readers. Thus, although we have not explicitly researched the use of the ISA in an RTI context, we have researched its use in all of the contexts that are involved in RTI implementations (e.g., classroom, small-group, one-to-one intervention).

The ISA is an approach, not a program. In preparing teachers to implement the ISA, we provide them with in-depth information about many aspects of early reading development and guidance and with suggestions for how this information might influence and be incorporated into instruction at the classroom, small-group, and individual levels. We offer a way of thinking about early literacy instruction that can potentially help teachers more effectively promote literacy development regardless of the curriculum they are using. The

ISA does not delineate particular materials or provide instructional scripts. Rather, we offer suggestions for instructional materials and for how teachers might evaluate and use the materials they have on hand to more effectively meet the needs of their students, particularly those who find learning to read more challenging.

The ISA takes account of the fact that reading is a complex process that draws on a number of abilities, knowledge sources, and dispositions, including the ability to read words, general language skills, knowledge related to the content of the text, and the intention of making sense of what is read. These abilities and knowledge sources interact to enable comprehension of written text. We take the position that early and long-term reading difficulties can be prevented if literacy instruction is comprehensive, responsive to individual students' needs, and fosters student independence.

Because learning to read the words is the most common stumbling block for students who are identified as struggling learners at the early stages of literacy development as well as for some students who experience longer term difficulties with reading, a good deal of emphasis is placed on helping students develop and use word-learning strategies effectively. We emphasize the need to help students develop a self-teaching mechanism (Share, 1995) that enables them to use code-based and meaning-based strategies in interactive and confirmatory ways to solve unfamiliar words encountered in text. Unfamiliar words that are accurately identified on multiple occasions are ultimately learned so well that they become part of the students' sight vocabulary (i.e., the body of words that can be identified accurately and effortlessly). This enlarged sight vocabulary, in turn, allows the students to devote more of their thinking to understanding and interpreting the things they read, because they do not need to devote as much cognitive energy to figuring out the words.

To be effective word solvers, students need to have a firm grasp of the workings of the alphabetic code and must approach reading as a meaning-making enterprise. Only then will students be able to use both code-based and meaning-based strategies to direct and check their word-solving attempts. Therefore, in working with struggling readers as well as with students who learn to read with relative ease, teachers are encouraged to address all aspects of literacy development and to shift the emphasis of instruction based on the students' performance levels.

In what follows, we describe the ISA in greater detail and illustrate how the approach can be embedded in the larger context of RTI. We briefly describe a

generalized model of RTI that we advocate and then describe the premises and structure of the ISA and the professional development and guidance that teachers involved in the research received.

## **A Model of RTI**

Efforts to intervene on behalf of students who are considered to be at risk for literacy learning difficulties should begin as early as the students can be identified (see Scanlon, in press) and should be coordinated across the settings in which literacy instruction is provided so as to avoid presenting the students with conflicting and confusing views of the reading process. To this end, RTI should be implemented in the early primary grades, and classroom and specialist teachers should be encouraged to agree on and adopt common expectations, strategies, resources, and terminology for early literacy instruction. Further, when teachers share responsibility for instructing students, there should be ongoing communication between and among the teachers regarding the students' progress and areas of difficulty.

Ideally, all teachers would monitor the progress of the students they teach by documenting their observations of the students' skills and abilities during routine instructional interactions. Although more formal progress-monitoring tools such as DIBELS (Good et al., 2001) and AIMSweb Progress Monitoring and RTI System ([www.AIMSweb.com](http://www.AIMSweb.com)) are often considered to be integral to an RTI process, we have not used such tools in our intervention efforts. These tools provide virtually no information that would guide instructional planning. Also, there is the risk that using such tools will lead to an emphasis on some aspects of the reading process (e.g., speedy word reading) and a deemphasis on the most important target of literacy instruction, comprehension (see Scanlon, in press, for a detailed discussion).

We realize, of course, that the use of assessments such as DIBELS and AIMSweb has the advantage of simplifying the decision making regarding whether students should receive more or less intensive forms of intervention. Further, performance on these measures tends to correlate with more comprehensive measures of reading ability. However, we are concerned that the frequent use of such measures consumes valuable instructional time and that, to date, there is little evidence that instructional decision making and student outcomes are enhanced by their use. In our research, we opted to use more comprehensive measures but to administer them less often—four times per

year. We also provided teachers with observational progress-monitoring tools, which were used on an ongoing basis in small-group and one-to-one instruction. Examples of these tools are provided in a later section.

In the following sections, we describe the structure of an ISA-based RTI model that involves implementation at the kindergarten and first-grade levels. In later sections, we describe the professional development provided for teachers and how the instruction is implemented.

### ***RTI in Kindergarten***

There is a good deal of research (including our own) that indicates that students who are apt to experience difficulties at the early stages of learning to read can be identified at kindergarten entry (or before). Our research suggests that attempts to intervene should begin in kindergarten when the students' knowledge gaps, relative to their peers, are comparatively small and before the students who are at risk come to identify themselves as less able readers/learners.

In our studies, all students for whom we had parental consent were assessed using a measure of early literacy skill during the first few weeks of kindergarten. In our most recent study (Scanlon et al., 2008), we used the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS; Invernizzi, Meier, & Juel, 2003–2007) to identify students who were at risk. The PALS provides a benchmark or cutoff for determining risk status, as do several other measures of early literacy skill. Generally, the cutoff is set at about the 25th or 30th percentile.

Such assessment is often referred to as “universal screening.” Depending on the population served by a given school and on the instructional philosophies of the preschool settings students may have encountered before kindergarten entry, placing the cutoff at the 30th percentile might yield an at-risk group of anywhere from 10% to 60% (or more) of the entering kindergarten class. Although using the 30th percentile as a cutoff may seem overly inclusive, it is important to note that it is used primarily to help teachers identify those students whose progress needs to be closely monitored. Scoring below the 30th percentile does not mean that a student will have difficulty learning to read. It simply means that the student does not yet demonstrate the skills that are typical for an entering kindergartner. If a student continues to lag in acquiring those skills, significant reading difficulties are likely to emerge.

Lack of skill at kindergarten entry may be attributable to a variety of factors, including a lack of opportunity to acquire these skills (most often the case), a

lack of interest in acquiring foundational literacy skills, and genuine difficulty with acquiring such skills. The student's response to high-quality and appropriately targeted instruction will help explain the initial lack of skill. In fact, the diagnostic value of a student's response to generally effective instruction/intervention is a central concept in RTI. However, in some RTI models, it is assumed that if a student does not profit from the type of instruction that is effective for most of his or her peers, which sometimes means whole-class and undifferentiated instruction, then that student may "suffer" from a learning disability. Although there can be no doubt that such a student suffers on some levels, this logic fails to take into account that young children differ tremendously in their understandings about how print and written language work. If instruction does not take account of these differences, it could be argued that the difficulties lie not with the student but with the instruction. We would argue that a student's response to instruction/intervention must be judged against the responsiveness and appropriateness of the intervention that is provided.

In commonly described RTI approaches, students who are identified as at risk would be monitored for a period of time as they participate in classroom language arts instruction, with an eye toward determining how readily they acquire the early literacy skills taught in the classroom language arts program. Because these students begin at a disadvantage, we would argue that, to close the gap between them and their peers, classroom language arts instruction needs to be modified to meet their needs. This can be accomplished most readily by providing small-group instruction for a portion of the time devoted to language arts instruction. Thus, language arts instruction in kindergarten would consist of a combination of whole-class and small-group instruction, with groups being formed on the basis of similarities in early literacy skills.

The focus of instruction in the small-group context should be geared to the students in the group. Sometimes when we make such a suggestion to teachers, they indicate that kindergartners are not ready for such focused instruction. To this we respond: Every student is ready to learn something. Our job is to figure out what he or she is ready to learn and teach it. When it appears that students are not ready for focused instruction, it is probably a sign that the focus of instruction is beyond their current point in literacy development. For example, students who know very little about the alphabet are ready to learn different things than are students who arrive in kindergarten already knowing the names of most of the letters and some of their associated sounds. There is no way that

the needs of such a divergent class of students can be adequately met with whole-class instruction alone.

However, if the gap between the at-risk group and the remainder of the class is to be closed, the students at risk need to learn more in a given period of time than do their more knowledgeable peers. To accomplish this acceleration, small-group, differentiated instruction needs to be provided, and the least knowledgeable students should be provided with more small-group time than their higher performing peers. In the classroom, this can be accomplished by providing small-group instruction for the at-risk students four or five times a week while providing small-group instruction for the remainder of the students only three or four times per week, depending on the distribution of students in the class.

An alternative or addition to providing intensified instruction in the classroom would be to provide the at-risk students with instruction beyond the classroom as well. In an RTI framework, such instruction is typically referred to as Tier 2 instruction. In the most widely discussed RTI models (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2008), Tier 2 instruction occurs only after a period of classroom instruction alone, when it becomes evident that high-quality classroom instruction, by itself, is unsuccessful in accelerating the progress of the at-risk students. However, to our knowledge, there has been no systematic comparison of the relative advantages of providing students with a period of Tier 1 instruction only before deciding that too little growth is occurring and, therefore, adding a second tier of intervention. Such research needs to be done. In the interim, we are inclined to agree with the argument made by Dorn and Schubert (2008) that there should be a sense of urgency with regard to meeting the instructional needs of students who are at risk of experiencing reading difficulties. Therefore, we would argue that periods of Tier 1 instruction alone might best be relatively brief unless there is very clear evidence that a student is making strong progress that will allow him or her to meet grade-level expectations by the end of the school year.

In our studies, Tier 2-type intervention began in mid to late October (approximately four to six weeks into the school year) and continued through mid to late May. Students were seen in groups of three for 30 minutes twice each week. On average, the students received approximately 50 intervention sessions during their kindergarten year. Because we were conducting research, all students remained in intervention throughout their kindergarten year. However, for many of them, in a nonresearch, normal service delivery model, it would have been appropriate to discontinue their involvement earlier. We also found

that as the school year progressed, classroom teachers, recognizing the progress that the students in intervention were making, would request that other students in their class who initially did not qualify for intervention be allowed to participate in the intervention instead of the students who no longer appeared to need it. The fact that these requests occurred makes it clear that in RTI implementations, there need to be multiple opportunities for teachers to determine, based on both observation and more formal assessment data, which students are in greatest need of more intensive intervention services and which can be appropriately supported with classroom instruction alone.

There were, of course, students who did not make the desired amount of progress with a combination of classroom instruction and Tier 2 intervention in kindergarten. In general, we did not provide intervention in kindergarten beyond Tier 2. However, there were a few instances in which kindergartners were provided with Tier 3 intervention. This occurred when a student's progress was so slow and divergent from the progress of the other students in the small-group settings that the student's continued inclusion in the small group impeded the progress of the other students in the group. Thus, the decision to provide one-to-one instruction for these students was determined to be in the best interests of the other students in the Tier 2 group as well as the individual student. In our research, the number of students who were provided with one-to-one instruction in kindergarten was very small—less than 1% of the students who participated in intervention.

### ***RTI in First Grade***

We advocate universal screening at the beginning of each school year and suggest that students who fall below the 25th or 30th percentile be given special attention. Exactly what sort of special attention they receive would depend on their instructional and achievement history. For example, students who were identified as at risk in kindergarten and demonstrated limited progress when provided with both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions would be provided with a combination of one-to-one intervention (Tier 3) and differentiated classroom instruction (Tier 1) at the beginning of first grade (see Scanlon et al., 2010). Students who were at risk in kindergarten and had made good progress with Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions might be provided with a period of less intensive intervention (a combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2) at the beginning of first grade on the assumption that their performance levels at the beginning of first grade

were the result of limited engagement with literacy over the summer months and that classroom and supplemental small-group instruction could compensate for these limitations.

For students who had never been identified as at risk in kindergarten, poor performance at the beginning of first grade might, once again, be due to limited literacy engagement over the summer months. For these students, a period of classroom instruction alone (Tier 1) might be the most appropriate first step. For students who are new to the school at the beginning of first grade and come with limited instructional histories, the most logical move might be to provide them with a combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, if there are appropriate instructional groups available for them, as their limited skills might well be attributable to limitations in instruction. If their skills are extremely low, a combination of both Tier 3 and Tier 1 interventions is likely to be the most effective way to institute the degree of acceleration necessary to allow them to meet grade-level expectations. Thus, at grade 1, decisions about the level of intervention to offer students who qualify for the close-monitoring group hinge on the students' histories (or lack thereof) of responding to instructional interventions.

As the school year progresses, adjustments should be made in the intensity of intervention offered to the students receiving various tiers of intervention. Adjustments might include reducing or increasing the intensity of intervention. For students who make very limited progress despite highly intensive, comprehensive, and responsive intervention (i.e., daily one-to-one intervention provided over a protracted period of time by a teacher with expertise in supporting early literacy development), next steps might include referring the student for additional forms of evaluation to identify potential barriers to progress and identifying the student as being in need of special education services. Although there is little evidence that such a designation will enhance literacy development, it is often necessary for the purposes of providing the students with the level of ongoing support that they will need to cope with the demands of learning grade-level content related to literacy and other academic domains. However, once a student is identified as LD, it is important to continue to provide literacy instruction that is as comprehensive and intensive as possible (see Chapter 4). Our work with older students identified as LD suggests that intensive, responsive, and comprehensive literacy instruction can dramatically accelerate the progress of students identified as LD (see Chapter 9).

## ***RTI in Second Grade and Beyond***

Although we have yet to do formal intervention research in second and third grade, we have provided consultation and guidance for teachers who are providing intervention at these grade levels. In our experience, some schools have taken seriously the notion that, in an RTI model, students should progress through three successive tiers regardless of the grade level at which the process begins. We strongly advise against such a plan. Students who are performing far below their grade-level peers are unlikely to benefit from a period of Tier 1 intervention alone (see Chapters 3 and 4). More intensive interventions should be instituted as early in the school year as possible.

## **Professional Development Based on the ISA**

### ***Structure of the Professional Development Program***

Implied but unaddressed in the earlier discussion of the RTI model is the importance of providing students identified as at risk with appropriately targeted and high-quality instruction. A basic tenet of RTI is that high-quality instruction is provided at each of the tiers of intervention and schools are expected to document the quality of instruction by demonstrating that most students make progress. One potential use of the periodic assessments is to identify instructional situations that are not working for students and take steps to strengthen that instruction. As noted earlier, we are impressed by the research indicating that what the teacher knows and does is more important to student achievement than the program that the teacher uses. In preparing teachers to more effectively promote students' reading development, our emphases are on developing teacher knowledge and skills and encouraging schools to promote consistency and coherence across instructional settings.

In our most recent study (Scanlon et al., 2008), intervention and classroom teachers participated in essentially the same professional development program. The program consisted of a summer workshop, a detailed handbook that reiterated and elaborated on the content of the workshop, and various follow-up activities during the ensuing school year. For kindergarten classroom teachers, the program encompassed a three-day summer workshop, while for first-grade teachers, the workshop was four days in length. At both grade levels, the workshop was followed by monthly grade-level meetings within participating schools and periodic (one-to-one) classroom observation/coaching sessions. In

these sessions, the teachers were observed during their language arts instruction, and then they met with an early literacy collaborator (ELC) who is an expert in the ISA. The purpose of these sessions was to help the teacher implement the ISA in a coordinated way with the literacy curriculum that was already in place in the school/classroom. These collaboration sessions occurred, at a minimum, five times per year.

Kindergarten and first-grade intervention teachers participated in the same initial workshop as did classroom teachers plus a day or two that focused on the planning, delivery, and documentation of small-group (Tier 2) and one-to-one (Tier 3) intervention lessons. Throughout the period of professional development, both intervention and classroom teachers were repeatedly reminded that they were teaching children, not programs, and that to be optimally effective, every effort must be made to ensure that instruction did not provide students with conflicting views of the literacy process. For example, intervention teachers were encouraged to learn about and support their students' classroom language arts program so that the students who knew the least would not be asked to learn more than their classroom peers. Furthermore, intervention teachers were encouraged to learn about the phonics instruction that was being provided in the classroom and support the students' development of skill relative to that program rather than introduce an entirely different approach to teaching phonics skills.

The monthly professional development sessions for classroom teachers were planned for individual buildings and grade levels and based on teacher concerns and interests and on the ELC's sense of priorities relative to helping teachers implement the ISA in the context of the existing curriculum. However, in general, the monthly meetings tended to revolve around one of the main goals of the ISA (as described later in this chapter) and often involved revisiting the content that had been presented in the initial summer workshop.

For the intervention teachers, follow-up professional development occurred in group meetings that occurred every other week at the research center. During these meetings, the content of the workshop and handbook were revisited and intervention sessions were reviewed and discussed. Audio or video recordings of intervention sessions were periodically reviewed at these meetings. In addition, intervention teachers were periodically observed and coached by the ELC assigned to their school as they taught their small-group or one-to-one intervention sessions. Generally the individual observations occurred once every four to eight weeks, depending on the perceived need of the intervention teacher.

The observations often focused on the group or individual students whom the intervention teacher found to be most challenging to teach. These coaching sessions usually had a collaborative, student-focused, problem-solving approach, and every effort was made to avoid having the teachers feel that the purpose was evaluative.

### ***Content of the ISA Professional Development Program***

Early literacy instruction based on the ISA is intended to be highly responsive to what individual students know and are able to do and to be useful in and supportive of a variety of classroom language arts curricula. The ISA professional development program focused on the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about the potential causes of early reading difficulties and the ways in which various types of difficulties might be addressed through instruction. Early in the workshop component of the professional development program, we introduced and discussed a set of basic instructional principles that were intended to guide teachers' efforts to be responsive to and supportive of the skills and abilities of individual students. Once introduced, these basic principles were revisited throughout the duration of the professional development program and, we hoped, would serve as guiding principles throughout the teachers' careers.

The major focus of the ISA professional development program is a set of instructional goals for beginning readers. For each of the goals, teachers were provided with a brief review of the theory and research related to the goal and a more thorough discussion of how the goal might be accomplished through instructional interactions. In presenting each goal, its relationship to the other instructional goals (particularly the end goal of reading comprehension) was also discussed. Our intention was that, by using a goal structure to guide their observations of students and their resultant instructional planning and decision making, instruction would ultimately be very purpose oriented rather than activity oriented and, as a result, be much more effective in accelerating students' progress. We discuss the instructional principles of the ISA followed by the goals for the students in the sections that follow.

## **Instructional Principles of the ISA**

Five basic instructional principles are taught and repeatedly revisited during the course of the ISA professional development program. These principles are

described in the following sections. It is important to note that the principles are not necessarily ordered by importance.

### ***Principle 1: Adopt a Vygotskian Perspective on Teaching and Learning***

Vygotsky (1978) was a developmental theorist who believed that much of what a child learns is the result of extended interactions with an adult or more expert “other.” From his perspective, the skills that children acquire reflect the internalization of problem solving that the child has initially done in collaboration with an adult who has provided careful verbal guidance to direct the child’s thinking. Children are believed to internalize the verbal guidance initially provided by the teacher (or expert other) in such a way that it ultimately becomes a form of inner speech that guides the children’s thinking when they encounter similar problem-solving situations. Because reading acquisition essentially involves the children in solving a series of cognitive problems, we feel that this characterization of the teaching–learning process is valuable, as it focuses on helping children become effective problem solvers—or strategic readers.

If we assume that the adult’s speech (and through it, the adult’s thinking) is, on some level, internalized by the child, then it becomes important to carefully consider instructional language. It is important to try to take the perspective of a student relative to teacher language. In the English language, there are multiple terms that can refer to the same concept and multiple concepts that are sometimes labeled with the same term. Therefore, it is easy, particularly with students who struggle with literacy acquisition, for teachers to inadvertently use terminology that carries no meaning or a different meaning for an individual student. For example, some beginning kindergartners might think a letter is something that comes in the mail, not a squiggle that is associated with a sound. It is remarkably easy to wrongly assume that students know or understand things and as a result have an instructional episode be quite confusing to them. Virtually every teacher has had this experience.

It is also important to give students the opportunity to see how to use the problem-solving processes we teach. Because problem solving is a thinking process, the only way the students can “see” the process is if we think out loud. The name for this approach to instruction is called think-aloud. It has been found to be an important component of instruction in attempts to develop strategic thinking. When we think out loud for the students, we are essentially guiding

the development of their thinking. The use of think-alouds is particularly relevant when we attempt to teach students to use strategies.

Vygotsky (1978) also argued that the most effective instruction focuses on skills and abilities that are somewhat too challenging for the child to handle independently but are easy enough for the child to handle when assistance is offered at key points. The disparity between what children are able to do with and without assistance is referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). To instruct in the ZPD, the teacher needs to offer learning opportunities that present some challenge, but not so much as to overwhelm the child.

Based on Vygotsky's theory, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) developed the concept of scaffolding as an analogy for the role that skilled collaborators play in supporting a student's learning. Scaffolding involves the provision of temporary supports that allow students to successfully accomplish a task that is too challenging for them to accomplish on their own. Scaffolding also involves the gradual reduction of support as students demonstrate the ability to regulate their own thinking and problem solving. To do the types of assessment, modification, and scaffolding suggested earlier, it is necessary for the teacher to have a firm grasp of the developmental progression of the skills he or she is helping the students develop. The development of such expertise is a focus in much of the ISA professional development program.

## ***Principle 2: Provide Engagement Opportunities for All Students***

In general, the more reading and writing students do and the more they practice the underlying skills that are foundational for reading and writing, the more quickly they become proficient. This is true when students actually engage in the cognitive processes required to read and write. Unfortunately, students sometimes find ways of avoiding the thinking parts of instructional activities. For example, in a choral reading situation, when the entire class or group is engaged in reading the same text, some students might not be looking at the words and thinking about them. Rather, they might be simply gazing in the right direction and saying the words slightly after their friends say them. These students might look engaged, and might in fact be engaged in the meaning construction part of the process, but they are not involved in the kind of thinking that will help them learn to read on their own. They need the opportunity to read text to the teacher or to a friend to fully engage in the necessary thinking processes.

Similar types of disengagement can arise when a teacher calls on one student before asking a question, because the students who are not called on know that they are not expected to answer. If, on the other hand, the teacher asks the question without immediately calling on an individual, more students are likely to engage in the thinking that the task involves. Better still, if all the students have dry erase boards or chalkboards to write on, they could all engage in the task. During a shared writing activity, the teacher might say, “Write down the letter you think I need at the beginning of the word *dog*.” This allows every student to respond, and, as a result, they are all likely to benefit from the instructional interaction. We strongly encourage teachers to incorporate opportunities for every student to respond during the course of instruction and ensure that the thinking that the students actually engage in moves them forward relative to the instructional goal of the activity.

### ***Principle 3: Set High Expectations for All Students***

At various points in the history of education, people have believed that some children are destined to have great difficulty learning to read or write and that there is little to be done to help them overcome their difficulties. Research has demonstrated that students tend to live up to the expectations we have for them. Thus, a belief that a student is unlikely to make progress has the clear potential to slow the progress made by that student. Conversely, the expectation that a student will succeed academically increases the likelihood that he or she will. In fact, research conducted in “Beat the Odds” schools, where students succeed at much higher levels than might be expected given their socioeconomic circumstances, indicates that a common characteristic of such schools is that all school staff hold high expectations for all of the students (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

RTI approaches to literacy learning difficulties arose from the research demonstrating that nearly all students can make substantial progress in acquiring literacy skills if instruction is appropriately targeted to meet their needs. This research makes it easier to hold high expectations for students who initially demonstrate limited literacy skills. Every student is expected to do well in reading and writing development, and if the student is not progressing, we now know that it is more important to examine the instruction than to examine the student to try to determine what has gone wrong. Students learn what we teach them, as long as we teach them what they are prepared to learn. The challenge, of

course, is that the students in any given classroom generally are not all ready to learn the same things, at least with regard to reading and writing. Nevertheless, students are all expected to attain the same grade-level standards, which is why a tiered approach to instruction and intervention is so important to promoting literacy success.

#### ***Principle 4: Interface Support Services With the Classroom Program***

For students who are receiving intervention services beyond the classroom, it is important that the instruction in all settings work to mutually supportive ends. This principle was discussed earlier but warrants reiteration because so many RTI efforts seem to violate this principle. There are many ways in which classroom and supplemental instruction can be profitably interfaced. For example, at the kindergarten level, if instruction about the alphabet is sequenced in a particular way, it makes sense to sequence alphabet instruction in intervention settings to parallel the instructional sequence in the classroom. Similarly, if keywords are used in the classroom to support the learning of letter sounds, supplementary instruction should use the same keywords.

Additional suggestions include, when appropriate, teaching and practicing the same high-frequency words across settings, using at least some of the same reading materials across settings, and engaging the students in similar writing activities. By increasing the congruence between classroom and supplementary instruction, we hope to increase the instructional impact of both the classroom program and the intervention program. The students who struggle in the classroom program will be better prepared for subsequent instruction in that program if they have reviewed some of the material in another context.

#### ***Principle 5: Plan for Success***

In all instructional interactions, teachers should make every effort to structure the activities so that the students experience success and the rewarding feelings that go along with success. The teachers should look for opportunities to provide genuine praise for the students' efforts and avoid negative and discouraging comments. Although teachers might sometimes feel frustrated that they have yet to find a way to help a particular student accomplish a particular objective, communicating this frustration only serves to make the student feel that his or

her situation might be hopeless. If the student is not progressing in a certain area, it is important to try to determine the source of the problem. Perhaps the level of difficulty needs to be reduced. Perhaps the student is misconstruing the task. Perhaps the teacher is using terminology for certain concepts that differs from the terminology to which the student is accustomed.

## **Instructional Goals of the ISA**

In this section, we present the five instructional goals around which we encourage teachers to build their instruction in classroom and intervention settings. During professional development workshops, we emphasize that the goals can be pursued in a variety of instructional contexts (e.g., one-to-one, small group, whole class) and components (e.g., read-aloud, shared reading, supported reading, writing). Teachers are encouraged to view instruction as a goal-oriented activity wherein they work to help students achieve identified goals using a variety of instructional formats and materials. The goals range from the relatively simple and straightforward (e.g., developing letter-name knowledge) to complex and involved (e.g., helping students become strategic and active readers).

As we discuss each goal, we highlight the importance of being able to view literacy and literacy-related skills from the perspective of a young child who is a relative novice when it comes to understanding the intricacies of written language and how it relates to spoken language. Often in our formal and informal observations of teachers working with young students, and in our own work with young students who are having difficulty learning about written language, we are struck by how difficult it is for highly literate people to take a step back and understand the complexity of reading and writing processes from the perspective of a young person who is just learning about print. It is difficult to respond to a child's confusion if one does not understand the source of the confusion.

In a forthcoming book describing the ISA (Scanlon et al., 2010), we discuss each goal in detail, review the relevant research related to the goal, and discuss why and how the goal relates to reading and writing processes more generally. We also discuss and provide sample instructional activities that can be used to help the student accomplish the goal, and where relevant, we discuss more and less challenging aspects of particular activities, often presenting a sequence of objectives within given goals. We also discuss the kinds of difficulties students might have, why they have those difficulties, and what teachers can do to alleviate those difficulties. Here, because such detail is obviously beyond the scope

of a single chapter, we list each goal and briefly discuss it. With the exception of the first goal, Motivation to Read and Write, the ordering of the goals should not be taken as an indication of their importance.

### **Goal 1: Motivation to Read and Write**

*The student will develop the belief that reading and writing are enjoyable and informative activities that are not beyond his or her capabilities.*

In discussing this goal, we focus on a variety of factors that contribute to motivation, such as ensuring that students face an appropriate level of challenge in literacy tasks, that they have some choice in what they read, that teachers model enthusiasm for reading and writing activities and actively engage students in thinking about and responding to texts, that read-aloud is an important and interactive part of the day, and that teachers should construe reading and writing as pleasant and rewarding activities rather than as jobs (e.g., “You *get* to finish your book before recess,” rather than, “You *have* to finish your book before recess.”). Related to the later point, teachers are encouraged to avoid the use of stickers or other tokens to reward engagement in literate activity, as such rewards have the potential to communicate to students that reading and writing are work that requires an external reinforcement rather than inherently rewarding activities. Early on, when teachers feel that they absolutely need some sort of reward to elicit engagement, they are encouraged to use the opportunity to play one of several literacy skill games that have proven to be quite motivating for students and that also help promote the development of foundational literacy skills.

### **Goal 2: Alphabetics**

*The student will understand the relationships between printed and spoken language and will be able to use these relationships in reading and writing.*

Within this overarching goal, there are several interrelated subgoals that pertain to the development of skill with the alphabetic code.

#### **Purposes and Conventions of Print**

*The student will understand that the purpose of print is to communicate. The student will also understand the most basic print conventions, such as the left-to-right and top-*

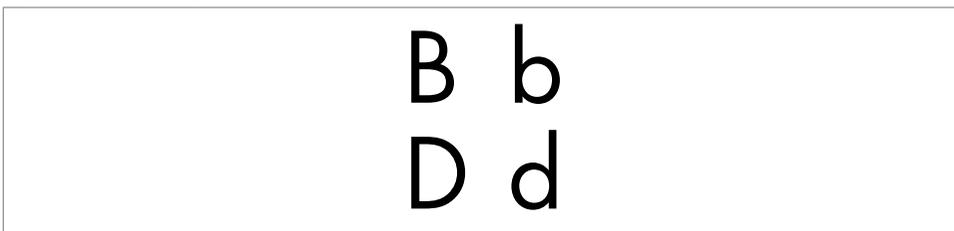
*to-bottom sequencing of print, where to begin reading a book, and the concepts of letter and word.*

In the current iteration of the ISA, this is the first subgoal addressed in the alphabetic goal, largely because, if students do not have some insight into the purposes and conventions of print, it will be difficult for them to make much progress relative to alphabetic knowledge. Thus, the discussion of this goal is critical, albeit brief relative to the other goals addressed. The main points made are that some students experience confusion related to purposes of print and to the conventions relating to how print is organized. Therefore, in early instruction, teachers need to be explicit about these concepts.

For example, during shared reading activities, teachers of emergent readers should point to the words as they read and, on occasion, engage the students in discussions of where on the page to begin reading, which way to progress, and so on. Teachers are also encouraged to make pointed use of key terms that are potentially confusing for early literacy learners. For example, while jointly examining a page in an emergent-level text with a group of students, the teacher might talk about how many words are in the sentence, what the spaces are for, how many letters there are in a particular word, and so on. As students progress, more advanced print conventions are discussed, such as the role of punctuation marks and variations in print size.

In addressing this goal, we also discuss the areas of confusion students demonstrate at the early stages of learning to read. Because many of these areas (such as calling a *b* a *d*) were once thought to be hallmarks of reading disability or dyslexia, it is important for teachers to understand that the instructional guidance they provide when the students make such errors can help avoid long-term confusion of this sort. It is remarkable to us that, although the research community has known for decades that such confusion is due to the student's difficulty in remembering which symbol is called by which name, we have failed to effectively communicate this fact to the public at large. Thus, we still encounter some teachers and many parents who believe that these areas of confusion are caused by visual processing difficulties. Learning that a written symbol's orientation in space is a significant clue to its identity is an important convention of print that students need to learn. Because the confusion of lowercase *b* and *d* tends to be common, we encourage teachers to provide a graphic display of an upper- and lowercase *B* and *D* (see Figure 2.1), so students can check themselves when they are uncertain of the identity of the lowercase version. (Students do not tend to confuse the uppercase versions of these letters.)

**Figure 2.1. Graphic Used to Prevent *b/d* Confusion**



### **Phoneme Awareness**

*The student will have a conceptual grasp of the fact that words are made up of somewhat separable sound segments. Further, the student will be able to say individual sounds in simple words spoken by the teacher and blend separate sounds to form whole words.*

In order for students to understand the relationships between the letters in printed words and the sounds in spoken words and effectively use that knowledge in reading and writing, they must gain some insight into the phonemic nature of spoken language. In addressing this goal, we first work to attune teachers to the phonemes in spoken language. Many highly literate adults are confused about how to segment words in which there are more letters than sounds (e.g., three = /th/-/r/-/ē/) or more sounds than letters (e.g., box = /b/-/o/-/k/-/s/), and we find the need to emphasize that, for the purpose of instruction in phonemic awareness, teachers need to think about sounds and not letters. We discuss various approaches to developing phonemic awareness, with a particular emphasis on blending (i.e., hearing separate phonemes spoken by the teacher and blending them to form a word) and segmenting (i.e., articulating the separate sounds in a word). We discuss the relative difficulty of analyzing words into different units (e.g., onsets and rimes versus individual phonemes).

We also discuss the features of phonemes that make them more and less challenging for students to attend to or manipulate. For example, some phonemes, such as the sounds represented in print by the letters M and S, can be elongated without distorting them (e.g., “mmmm” or “ssss”), thereby making it relatively easy to draw students’ attention to them in spoken words. However, other phonemes, such as the sounds associated with the letters B and K, cannot be elongated without distortion. For example, the sound for B is typically pronounced “buh,” and we have often heard teachers emphasize the sound as “buuuhhhh,” which is not particularly helpful to a student trying to attend to the /b/.

We try to instill in teachers the understanding that it would be easier to draw students' attention to the sounds in the word *fin* than to the sounds in the word *dot*, because all of the sounds in *fin* can be elongated without distortion whereas neither of the consonant sounds in *dot* can be. Once teachers are secure in this understanding, it is much easier for them to plan instruction for students who have little to no phonemic analysis skill (and so need instruction that uses words comprised of stretchable sounds) and adjust instruction in accord with the differing skills of students in an instructional group. As students demonstrate a grasp of the phonemic analysis concepts for words with stretchable sounds, instruction moves on to include words in which the sounds cannot be elongated without distortion.

To document progress and guide instructional planning, teachers are encouraged to use checklists of skills. The checklist for phonological skills is presented in Figure 2.2. This version provides space for teachers to record their observations of phonological skills for students in a small group (up to five). The checklist is organized around the major skills that are the focus of instruction and, within each major objective, the progression that would be followed in helping students achieve that objective.

To limit the paperwork burden, teachers are encouraged to use the notational system provided at the bottom of the form that involves marking a single slash to indicate that instruction has begun to address a particular objective, crossing that slash (to form an X) when the student appears to be making progress in accomplishing the skill or objective, and adding a third line (to form an asterisk) when, in the teacher's judgment, the student has a firm grasp of the skill or concept and no longer needs instruction on that particular objective. Using such a system, it is easy for teachers and their supervisors to identify students who are making substantially less progress than their peers. There is also a clear connection between the documentation of student progress and instructional planning. Further, these checklists can be compared to determine whether there are discrepancies in progress between instructional groups that may require attention.

### **Letter Identification**

*The student will be able to name, rapidly and accurately, all 26 letters of the alphabet, both upper- and lowercase versions.*

For students who know very little about the alphabet, initial instruction focuses on teaching the names of letters rather than teaching simultaneously about the

**Figure 2.2. Group Snapshot for Phonological Skills**

Group Snapshot: Phonological Skills					
Student Names					
<b>I. Sensitivity in Text</b>					
Completes rhyme in known text					
Identifies rhyme in text					
Identifies alliteration in text					
<b>II. Sound Sorting</b>					
Beginning sound					
Rhyme					
Ending sound					
Medial vowel					
<b>III. Sound Blending</b>					
Onset-rime with pictures					
Onset-rime without pictures					
Single phoneme with pictures					
Single phoneme without pictures					
<b>IV. Sound Counting/Segmentation</b>					
Two phonemes, with stretchable consonants					
Two phonemes, with stop consonants					
Three phonemes, with stretchable consonants					
Three phonemes, with stop consonants					
Words with consonant blends					

**Beginning**

**Developing**

**Proficient**

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letters' names, sounds, and keyword mnemonics as is often done in kindergarten programs. Students with very limited knowledge are likely to become overwhelmed if asked to learn all of that at once. In rationalizing the initial focus on letter names, we focus on how young children often rely on the names of the letters as an aid to remembering their sounds. For example, the sound for the letter *B* is the first phoneme in its name (/b/). Thus, if students know the name of the letter, it will be easier for them to remember the sound of the letter. This relationship between the letter name and the letter sound works for most but not all of the letters of the English alphabet.

We stress the importance of teachers developing sensitivity to young students' inclination to use letter names to derive letter sounds because understanding what the students are doing influences the feedback that teachers provide. For example, if a student wrote the word *chip* as *HP*, a teacher might well respond by trying to help the student analyze the beginning sound in the word *chip*, thereby confusing the student who selected the *H* to represent the /ch/ because the name of the letter "aich" includes the phoneme /ch/—just as the name of the letter *M* includes the phoneme /m/.

In discussing this goal, we also begin to address fluency with foundational skills as an important contributor to reading comprehension. We stress that automaticity with letter identification is important to free up cognitive resources for higher level skills. To promote fluency with letter identification, we stress the importance of having the students use the letter names frequently during the course of the various activities used to promote letter-name knowledge.

### **Letter–Sound Association**

*The student will be able to associate the most common sounds of individual letters with their printed representations.*

In discussing this goal, we continue to focus on the relationship between letter names and letter sounds, how to take advantage of that relationship, and how to address the areas of confusion that arise for those letters where the relationship does not hold (i.e., the consonants *H*, *W*, and *Y* and most of the short vowels). We discuss the importance of using keywords to help students remember letter–sound correspondences, using the same keywords across instructional settings and grade levels, and explicitly teaching students how to use the keywords when reading and writing. In contrast to these recommendations, our observations in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms have revealed that teachers often have multiple alphabet strips on display that are used inconsistently, if at

all, and the students are rarely taught how to use the keywords independently. Moreover, some of the keywords used are poor exemplars of the sounds they are supposed to represent. For example, the words *train* and *truck* are sometimes used as keywords for *T*, although when pronounced, both sound like they begin with a /ch/ as in *chrain* and *chruck*.

### **The Alphabetic Principle**

*The student will understand that the letters in printed words represent the sounds in spoken words and will understand how to use the alphabetic code to read and spell words.*

In discussing this goal, we follow a progression from an early understanding about how the letters in printed words represent the sounds in spoken words, initially focusing on beginning sounds, then ending sounds, and then the interior parts of words. As the students progress, they are taught about consonant digraphs (e.g., *sh*, *ch*, *th*) and learn to decode consonant blends through a process of sounding each consonant and then blending the sounds together.

In teaching about vowel sounds, each vowel is taught individually. For each vowel, its two most common sounds are taught simultaneously, with the logic being that this requires the students to learn only one new association for the vowel because they will have already learned the name of the letter, hence its long-vowel sound. Additional logic, and the most important one, for this approach to teaching vowel sounds is that many of the spelling–sound inconsistencies that characterize the English writing system involve the vowels. We argue that if students come to view vowels as decision points and learn to be flexible about the vowel sounds they try as they are attempting to puzzle through unfamiliar words encountered in text, they will be able to successfully identify a higher number of the words encountered.

For example, if a student encounters the sentence “The boy saw a wild dog,” and initially decoded the *i* in *wild* as a short *I*, the result would be a nonsensical sentence: “The boy saw a willed dog.” However, assuming that the student was attending to meaning and therefore was alerted to the decoding problem, the student’s awareness of the need to be flexible with the vowels (i.e., try alternate sounds) is apt to allow him or her to accurately identify the word *wild*, thus allowing the student to comprehend the sentence and helping add the word *wild* to the body of words that he or she can identify automatically.

It is interesting to note that several of the teachers with whom we have worked over the years were initially reluctant to teach their students about the vowel-flexing strategy, because they thought it would be too difficult and confusing

for them. However, once they tried it, they reported success and surprise at how effective it was in facilitating students' word-solving attempts. The use of vowel flexing while reading connected text is discussed in greater detail in Goal 3.

With regard to the alphabetic goal, however, it is important to note that the vehicle used for helping students become facile with the alphabetic skills discussed thus far is to engage students in exercises focused on isolated words. Such exercises include word building, in which students use a limited set of letter tiles to build words dictated by the teacher; word reading, in which the teacher makes words with letter tiles and the students read them; and word writing, in which students write words dictated by the teacher without the support of having a limited set of letter tiles (as in word building).

In these activities, minimal changes are made from one word to the next so that the students' attention can be focused on the part(s) of the words that are under study. For example, when the students are learning about vowels, most of the changes involve alternations between the long and short sounds for a particular vowel. For instance, students might be taught the two sounds for A and the vowel-consonant-e (VCe) long-vowel spelling pattern and then be asked to build the following words, one after the next: *mat, mate, fate, fat, hat, hate, rate, rat*, and so on. Once students are facile with building, reading, and writing words that include the two sounds of A, the long and short sounds of another vowel would be taught and practiced (e.g., *bit, bite, kite, kit, dim, dime*). Later, the two vowels would be used in practice activities (e.g., *bit, bat, fat, fate, fame, tame, time, Tim*). The point of these practice activities is to help students become so flexible with the vowel sounds that they can readily draw on this knowledge when encountering unfamiliar words in text.

### **The Development of More Extensive Decoding and Encoding Strategies**

*The student will develop the ability to use both single-letter phonics and a variety of spelling patterns (e.g., phonograms, prefixes, suffixes) to decode and spell individual words.*

Although it is fairly common practice for teachers to instruct beginning readers on the use of phonograms, or word families, as decoding elements, we find that this instruction is often not as effective as it could be, because the instructional technique most often used involves having the students work with only one word family at a time. For example, the teacher might teach the -ight word family and engage students in making and reading the words *might, sight, bright, light, tight*, and so on. In this activity, all students really need to attend to is the

beginning part of the words, as that is the only part that changes. As a result, at least for some students, little is learned about the word family.

As an alternative, we have found it useful to have students working with at least two word families at a time. For example, once a new word family has been introduced and practiced, additional practice is provided with it in combination with one or more previously taught word families. Thus, the students might be engaged in building, reading, and writing the words *might*, *make*, *take*, *tight*, *fight*, *fake*, and so on. As for other decoding skills, we stress teaching and practicing each new coding skill in isolation prior to providing the opportunity for application in context. Thus, the new word family a teacher chooses to teach in a particular lesson would be drawn from a book that includes several instances of words in that family.

In first grade, we also teach students tactics for puzzling through words that are comprised of more than one syllable. Often this instruction occurs when the words are encountered in context, but for students who frequently struggle with such words, some isolated practice may also be provided. In first grade, the most commonly encountered multisyllabic words are those with inflectional endings (e.g., *running*, *wanted*). For these, we teach students to notice and temporarily ignore the endings (perhaps by covering up the ending with a finger), then decode the rest of the word, and then add the ending. We also teach breaking a word between double consonants and decoding each part, and we teach the C+le syllable pattern to provide the students with the logic for decoding words like *little*, *apple*, and *twinkle*.

Throughout our discussion on the alphabetic goal, teachers are reminded that opportunities to apply skills in context are important. Further, we encourage teachers to think through how instruction should proceed by considering what makes a decoding task more or less challenging and what materials the students will be reading. We also stress the benefits of guiding students to be strategic in using resources such as the keywords and word family charts to assist them in decoding and encoding activities.

### ***Goal 3: Word Learning and the Development of Sight Vocabulary***

*The student will learn to effortlessly identify a large number of words.*

To comprehend written material, readers need to be able to identify most of the words in the text with relative ease. This allows readers to devote most of their cognitive resources to the meaning-making enterprise. Thus, a major goal

of early literacy instruction is to help students build their sight vocabularies as quickly as possible. In discussing the development of sight vocabulary and how to facilitate its growth, we make a distinction between high-frequency words (e.g., *the, of, and, is*) and words that have a lower frequency of occurrence (e.g., *hop, swim, horse*) in both print and spoken language.

In the ISA, teachers are encouraged to teach high-frequency words directly and explicitly, because knowing these words to the point of automaticity will enable students to read approximately 50% of the words they encounter in just about any text. With regard to less frequently occurring words, however, a different tactic is needed. There is no way that teachers could possibly teach the tens of thousands of words that readers ultimately come to know as sight words. Therefore, students need to learn these words pretty much on their own through extensive reading of texts that provide some but not too much challenge and by effectively puzzling through and accurately identifying unfamiliar words encountered in text.

Share (1995) suggests that the ability to figure out unfamiliar words serves as a self-teaching mechanism. The notion that readers teach themselves most of the words in their sight vocabularies is a pivotal concept in the ISA, as it provides the logic for the heavy emphasis we place on explicitly teaching students to be strategic and active word solvers. In the ISA, teachers are taught two basic approaches to promoting the development of sight vocabulary: a strategic word-learning approach that aims to help students develop a self-teaching mechanism and a direct-teaching approach for high-frequency words that is used to speed the process of establishing these important words in the students' sight vocabularies. Thus, there are two word-learning subgoals, each of which focuses on a different vehicle for word learning.

### **Strategic Word Learning**

*The student will develop flexibility and independence in applying a variety of strategies to facilitate the identification of unfamiliar words encountered in text.*

The development of word-learning strategies is an important goal of the ISA and one of the most prominent ways in which it differs from other approaches to early literacy instruction and intervention. Instead of simply encouraging students to access a variety of sources of information in attempting to decode and confirm the identity of unfamiliar words encountered while reading, in the ISA we explicitly teach students to use a specific set of word-identification strategies (see Figure 2.3). The strategies include four code-based strategies (the second,

Figure 2.3. ISA Word Identification Strategy List

**To figure out a word:**



Check the pictures.

**fun**

Think about the sounds in the word.

**??**

Think of words that might make sense.

**sat**

Look for word families or other parts you know.



Read past the puzzling word.



Go back to the beginning of the sentence and start again.

**a e i o u**

Try different pronunciations for some of the letters, especially the vowel(s).

**Look / ing**

Break the word into smaller parts.

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third, seventh, and eighth strategies on the list) and four meaning-based strategies (the four other strategies on the list). The strategies are taught one at a time in preparation for reading a book in which a strategy is likely to be particularly useful.

Teachers follow a gradual release of responsibility procedure (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and begin by explaining what the strategy is, why it is useful, and how it is used. Then, they model the use of the strategy using a think-aloud procedure. For example, while reading a portion of text, the teacher might say,

I am going to pretend that I don't know this word, and I'll use our new strategy to figure it out. Our new strategy is, "Look for word families or other parts you know." We know that we can find word families by looking for the vowel and what comes after it. So, I find the vowel *i* and look at the next couple of letters: *g, h, t*. I-g-h-t! That is a word family we have learned: -ight. So, all I have to do is blend -ight with the first sound, /m/, and I get *might*. Then, I have to read the sentence to see if *might* makes sense. "Mom said she might let us stay up late." That makes sense, doesn't it? So, looking for the word family helped us figure out that word.

As each new strategy is taught, students are encouraged to use the strategy in an interactive and confirmatory way in conjunction with previously learned strategies. Early on, students are encouraged to use as much of the code-based information as they are able to use (based on the teacher's observations of the students' skills during alphabetic activities) and confirm or reject their initial hypotheses about the identity of a word using context-based strategies. For strategies that are new to the students, the teacher prompts them to use the strategy when they are fairly certain that the strategy will work in a particular context. As the students experience success in using the strategies when prompted, the teacher gradually withdraws his or her support in an effort to have the students take responsibility for word solving and confirming hypotheses about a word's identity.

Until students clearly demonstrate that they are routinely and effectively strategic in word solving, strategies are discussed before, during, and after the students engage in reading. Thus, before reading, the teacher might teach a new strategy or engage the students in reviewing the strategies that have recently been taught. During reading, the teacher might prompt a student to use a particular strategy or, depending on the student's point in development, ask, "What can you try?" when the student encounters a puzzling word. If necessary, the teacher might suggest that the student check his or her strategy list. On occasion, the teacher would engage the students in reflecting on their word-solving

successes. For example, when a student hesitates on a word and then identifies it, the teacher might say, “I saw you thinking about that word. How did you figure it out?”

An important objective for teachers in this instructional interaction is to be sure to give students as much responsibility for word solving and confirming as they are ready to handle. We have found this to be a bit of a challenge for teachers who are, by nature, helpful. We often encounter teachers who are new to the ISA doing too much of the thinking for the students. For example, when a student has been puzzling over a word and finally pronounces it correctly, the teacher would jump in and confirm the identification (e.g., “Uh-huh!” “Nice job!”). In doing so, the teacher deprives the student from engaging in the final step of the word-solving process—confirming that the identified word fits the sentence and that the sounds in the word match the letters.

Another teacher behavior that we try to retrain during the course of professional development is the habit of alerting students to word-identification errors by asking, “Does that make sense?” Because many teachers use this question only when something does not make sense, the question is interpreted by students to mean there is something wrong. Because we want students to be alert to meaning-disrupting errors/miscues, it is important to ask that question both when the sentence does make sense and does not, as this will help the students do the monitoring on their own.

As teachers listen to students read, they make note of the strategies the students use either spontaneously or with prompting. This information helps inform their future planning around word-identification strategy instruction. Planning for future instruction is also facilitated by the reflection on strategy use that occurs after the students have finished their reading. At this point in the lesson, the students and the teacher might engage in reflecting on the strategies that the students used, where they used them, which ones they still need to practice, and so forth.

The list of strategies provided in Figure 2.3 is gradually developed as the strategies and the mnemonic value of the symbol to the left of each strategy are taught. Students are encouraged to refer to the strategy list as a resource to remind them of the kinds of things they can do when puzzling over an unknown word. The rationale for teaching a small set of strategies explicitly is that, in doing so, we hope to provide students with a useful tool for self-prompting. In other words, with only a small set of strategies to think about, we expect

that the students will ultimately be able to internalize them and independently guide their word-solving attempts.

Of course, there is a clear connection between the word-solving strategies taught and the approach to alphabetic instruction (as described earlier) and the emphasis on meaning making (as we describe later). Only when a student has the foundational alphabetic knowledge and the clear understanding that text is supposed to make sense will the interactive and confirmatory use of strategies be possible. To promote coordinated use of these multiple knowledge sources, teachers are encouraged to help students see the connections between and among the various components of instruction. For example, in teaching a decoding skill, the teacher would typically explain that the students will be able to use the skill when they are reading and come to an unfamiliar word that contains that particular pattern. While engaging students in meaning-focused activities such as interactive read-alouds, the teacher would model the use of some of the meaning-based word-identification strategies. For example, on occasions when the teacher inadvertently misidentifies a word, he or she might say, “That doesn’t make sense! I need to go back and start again!”

As for other aspects of early literacy development, teachers are provided with checklists to use in documenting students’ progress in becoming effective word solvers. Figure 2.4 provides an example of a record form that might be used in small-group instruction. These forms are referred to as “snapshots” because they provide teachers with a quick picture of where students in an instructional group are and where they are ready to go.

### **High-Frequency Words**

*The student will be able to quickly and accurately identify a large number of high-frequency words.*

The most frequently occurring words tend to be difficult to learn because of their irregular spellings (e.g., *the*, *was*, *of*, *said*) and their abstract nature (e.g., how would you define *the*?). Therefore, we encourage teachers to explicitly teach and provide practice with these words. The first few words should be taught one at a time and in conjunction with having students read an emergent-level book that contains that word several times. After reading and reacting to the book, we would have the students go back into it to find and name the word each time it occurs. Later, the word would be used along with other previously taught words in gamelike practice activities.

**Figure 2.4. Record Form for Strategic Word Learning: Use of Word-Identification Strategies**

Group Snapshot: Strategic Word Learning Use of Word-Identification Strategies					
Strategy	Student Names				
	CP—Check the Pictures				
TS—Think about the Sounds in the word	First				
	Last				
	Medial				
MS—Think of words that might Make Sense					
WP—Look for Word families or other Parts you know					
RP—Read Past the puzzling word					
SA—Go back to the beginning of the sentence and Start Again					
DP—Try Different Pronunciations for some of the letters, especially the vowel(s).					
BW—Break the Word into smaller parts					
IC—Use multiple strategies in an Interactive and Confirmatory way					

Use the markings below to characterize the students' level of proficiency for each word-identification strategy.

**Beginning**                       **Developing**                       **Proficient**

**Beginning** indicates that instruction has addressed the strategy, but the student has only a preliminary understanding or capability with regard to its use.

**Developing** indicates that the students has some understanding of the strategy, but does not reliably or spontaneously use the strategy.

**Proficient** indicates that the student reliably and spontaneously demonstrates use of the strategy.

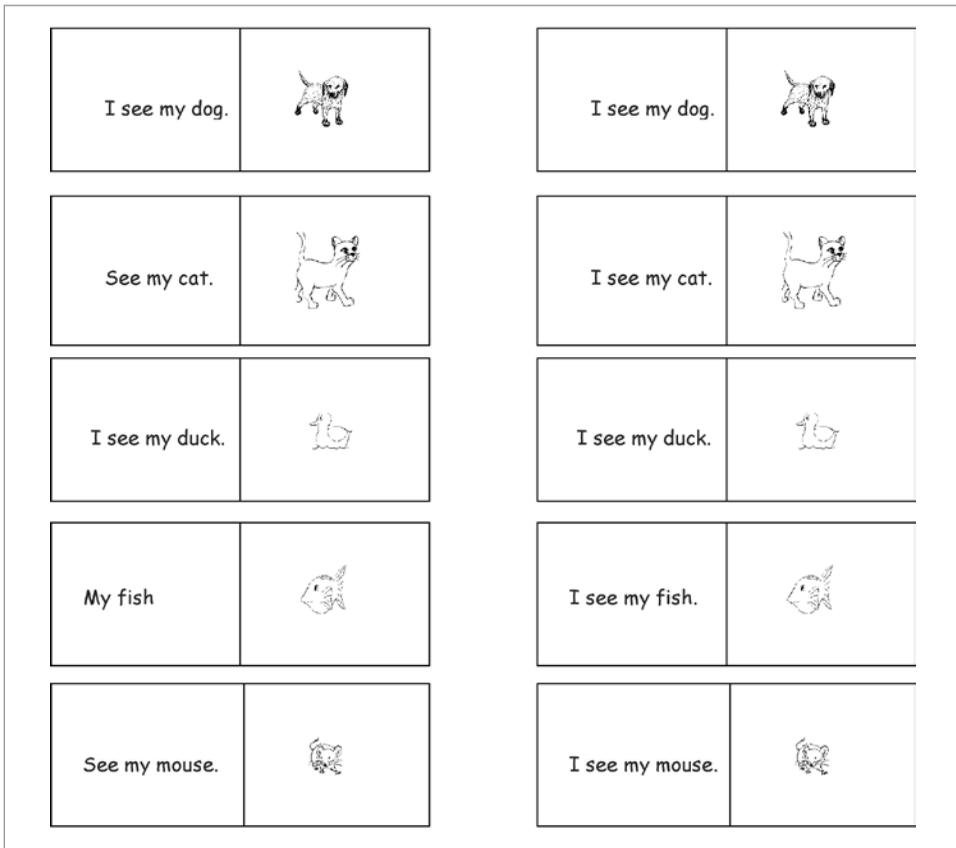
*Successful Approaches to RTI: Collaborative Practices for Improving K–12 Literacy* edited by Marjorie Y. Lipson and Karen K. Wixson. Copyright 2010 International Reading Association. May be copied for classroom use.

For example, the students might play tic-tac-toe with high-frequency words. Each student gets a different color marker, and on an individual's turn, he or she draws a word card from a deck, reads the word, and then writes it in the chosen space on the game board. The winner is determined by having three words of the same color in a row. Activities of this sort help stabilize the words' identities in the students' memories because they are naming and writing the words and, therefore, attending to their internal structure.

For the purpose of building high-frequency sight vocabulary, we have found it useful to employ books that build vocabulary in a cumulative way (i.e., a word that occurs frequently in the first book reappears in the second book but not as frequently, and again in the third book, and so on). Also, we have found that various series for books designed to help build high-frequency sight vocabulary can be differentially useful. For example, when a book uses a consistent and repetitive pattern (e.g., "I see the," "I see the," "I see the") from one page to the next, the students quickly memorize the pattern and, therefore, have little need to attend to the words. However, for a book in which the words are switched around a little, there is more of a need for the students to attend to the words, and as a result, students acquire the words more quickly. Figure 2.5 presents two renditions of a teacher-created book called *See My Pets*. The version on the left is more likely to help students learn the words *I*, *my*, and *see* than is the version on the right because the pattern is not entirely repetitive. The Short Books ([myshortbooks.com/Default.aspx](http://myshortbooks.com/Default.aspx)) are particularly good examples of the kinds of books we have found to be useful for developing skill in identifying the most frequently occurring words. However, virtually any of the sight word readers on the market can be modified in a way that would make them more useful for the purpose of building high-frequency sight vocabulary by using removable labels, a good primary font, and a printer.

For students who are further along in their reading development but continue to struggle with building high-frequency sight vocabulary, we have found that using books that include many repetitions of high-frequency words help to facilitate the development of this skill. For example, books by Margaret Hillert and Babs Bell Hajdusiewicz are particularly helpful. To keep the book easy and build in the desired repetition of high-frequency words, the language structures in these books tend to be rather unnatural. However, because the stories are supported by pictures and word repetition, students are able to read these books quite comfortably after the first few pages. We have encountered many students who were initially slow in acquiring high-frequency sight words who showed

Figure 2.5. Two Renditions of a Teacher-Created Book Called *See My Pets*



rapid gains in this aspect of reading when given the opportunity to read some of these books.

In working in small-group or one-to-one contexts with young struggling readers, we have also found it useful to maintain a “Words We [I] Know” chart that follows the format of a word wall but contains only the high-frequency words that the students in the group or the individual student knows. This chart is used for practice activities (e.g., reading all the words under the letter T) and as a reference for the students when they are reading and writing. Because our goal is for students to become automatic in their ability to identify high-frequency words, we encourage them to spell the words they know (i.e., the words on their chart) conventionally when they write by referring to the chart.

The logic here is that if students can read the word *was*, for example, but then spell it as *yz* or *wuz* when they are writing, their sound spellings will interfere with their ability to automatize the word. We encourage teachers to be careful with their wording when imposing this expectation. Telling students that they *get* to use their Words We [I] Know chart for the book spelling has a different impact than telling them they *have* to use it.

The Words We [I] Know chart can also be used as a form of progress monitoring for students in one-to-one intervention by tallying the number of words on the chart every week or two.

#### ***Goal 4: Vocabulary and Oral Language Development***

*The student will learn the meanings of new words encountered in instructional interactions and be able to use those words conversationally. Further, the student's ability to understand and use more complex grammatical structures will improve.*

Reading and writing are language skills, therefore, to a great extent, they are constrained and determined by students' oral language abilities. Students' levels of vocabulary development measured in the early primary grades are a good predictors of their reading comprehension through high school (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). If students have limited knowledge of word meanings or limited experience with book language, their reading development will be negatively affected. Interventions for young struggling readers have tended to focus primarily on helping students develop alphabetic and word-identification skills and placed comparatively little emphasis on language and comprehension. Until our most recent intervention study (Scanlon et al., 2008), we too were guilty of this shortsightedness. However, because the 2008 study focused on schools that served a high percentage of students living in poverty, and thus more likely to have limited language skills (Hart & Risley, 1995), we began to address vocabulary and language skills more intentionally in our work with classroom and intervention teachers.

In this most recent study, we were frequently struck by the number of times students struggled to identify a word not because they could not figure out how it sounded but because they did not know the meaning of the word. Thus, students might precisely decode a word or come up with a close approximation of the word's pronunciation but be unable to confidently identify (confirm) it, because they had no word stored in verbal memory that matched it. At least for students living in poverty, it appears that limitations in vocabulary knowledge

play a much greater role in early literacy development than is commonly recognized. Of course, influencing vocabulary development is a much larger undertaking than improving decoding skill, and we certainly do not feel that we have found an optimal way to address this daunting problem. Most studies that have specifically studied the effects of vocabulary interventions have found positive effects only for the words taught. They do not show generalized positive outcomes on word knowledge. Our results are no different. Nevertheless, because vocabulary knowledge plays such a pervasive role in reading comprehension and word learning, we are certain that teachers need to be more attuned to the role of vocabulary knowledge in early and long-term reading development and prepared to recognize and address difficulties that arise from limitations in vocabulary. Because vocabulary development is a gradual and ongoing process and most interventions for vocabulary and language skills have been of fairly limited duration, we remain hopeful that sustained and prolonged efforts to enhance these important language skills will, ultimately, prove to be effective.

In our 2008 intervention study we focused on interactive read-alouds as one of the most powerful means by which to enhance the vocabulary and language development of young children. Although, as noted previously, the professional development provided for classroom and intervention teachers was pretty much the same, we particularly stressed the role of interactive read-alouds in the classroom context, because they are a common practice in primary-level classrooms and support for vocabulary and language development can be more readily instituted in a classroom where the teacher has the students for most of every day. In working with teachers, we emphasize the fact that vocabulary is not effectively acquired in discrete lessons that focus on word learning. Rather, word meanings are acquired gradually through repeated encounters with a word in a variety of contexts. Therefore, classroom teachers are better positioned to support vocabulary acquisition and development more generally.

In the professional development for both classroom and intervention teachers, we relied heavily on the work of Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) to structure participants in thinking about how to select words for instruction, how instruction should proceed, and the importance of using targeted words repeatedly, in a variety of contexts, and over an extended period of time. In accord with Beck et al.'s recommendations, the power of interactive read-alouds was stressed. In addition, teachers were encouraged to provide students with ample opportunities to engage in extended conversations with adults and peers to promote the development of more general oral language skills.

## **Goal 5: Comprehension**

*The student will develop comprehension skills and strategies that will enhance his or her ability to construct the meaning of texts heard or read.*

In discussing this goal, we begin by attuning teachers to the constructive nature of comprehension and the fact that understanding the meaning of a text requires the reader to attend to the author's words and ideas and to what the reader already knows that is relevant to the topic. Across several studies, we have waffled a bit on the appropriateness of explicitly teaching comprehension strategies to young struggling readers. Although there is some evidence that doing so has a positive impact on comprehension (Roberts & Duke, 2010), we have been concerned that, because students in the ISA are focused on developing word-identification strategies, the addition of another layer of strategic thinking might be too much for them to handle. Therefore, we currently encourage teachers to rely on the research on comprehension strategies to guide their interactions with students around texts but not to explicitly teach comprehension strategies at least until the students are effective and independent word solvers.

For students in the early primary grades, the development of comprehension skills and strategies is discussed mainly in the context of read-alouds. We advocate active engagement of the students in discussions of texts. Teachers are encouraged to model various strategies and prompt the students to use them (e.g., "I think he's going to get a puppy for his birthday. What do you think he's going to get? Why?"). In addition, we discuss the value of reading and discussing informational texts to help build the critical knowledge base on which comprehension depends. As students begin to read texts on their own, we stress the importance of engaging students in discussions of what they are reading, as we have encountered many students who read quite fluently but have little recollection of what they read. Especially in light of the fact that many intervention studies have not been successful in boosting comprehension skills, we feel that it is important to focus on encouraging active engagement with the meaning of text from early on.

## **What Does ISA-Based Instruction Actually Look Like?**

Because of the goal-oriented nature of the ISA, we have described instruction in a way that may seem fragmented, so we want to conclude by pulling things together. The instructional goals and principles described earlier can be effectively

integrated into the context of both whole-class language arts instruction and small-group and one-to-one intervention settings. Table 2.1 illustrates this integration. Each of the goals is listed across the top, and the typical components of language arts instruction appear in the left column. The checkmarks reflect the

**Table 2.1. Intersection of the Goals of Instruction and the Components of Language Arts Instruction**

Language Arts Components	Instructional Groupings	Motivation	Alphabets			Word Learning		Language and Vocabulary	Knowledge and Comprehension
		Print Concepts	Phonological Analysis	Alphabetic Coding Skills (letter names, sounds, alphabetic principle, etc.)	Strategic Word Identification	High-Frequency Words			
Read-aloud	WC, SG, 1-1	✓✓		✓	✓	✓		✓✓	✓✓✓
Shared reading	WC, SG, 1-1	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Independent and buddy reading	WC, SG, 1-1	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Writing and composition	WC, SG, 1-1	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Oral language	WC, SG, 1-1	✓		✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓✓	✓✓
Foundational skills	WC, SG, 1-1	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Supported reading group	SG, 1-1	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

*Note.* Checkmarks represent the degree to which each instructional goal can be addressed in the context of given components of language arts instruction. ✓ = goal can be addressed to some extent, ✓✓ = goal can be strongly addressed; ✓✓✓ = goal can be strongly addressed. 1-1 = one-to-one; SG = small group; WC = whole class.

degree to which a given goal can be addressed in the context of a particular language arts component. The more useful a particular language arts component might be in addressing the goal, the more checkmarks there are. Although there is certainly room for debate regarding how many checkmarks might be placed in the given cells of this matrix, the general point should be clear—most of the goals can be effectively addressed in most language arts contexts. This does not, of course, mean that every goal should be addressed in every instructional interaction. Rather, our purpose in presenting this table is to reinforce the notions that instruction should be purposeful (goal oriented) and teachers should be constantly evaluating whether the instructional activities they use in language arts instruction actually move the students toward achieving the goals.

For purposes of meeting the needs of students who are at risk of experiencing reading difficulties, small-group (in and beyond the classroom) and one-to-one instruction that specifically address the students' current levels of understanding and specific instructional needs is a critical component in addressing and preventing long-term learning difficulties. In kindergarten, small-group intervention in the classroom (Tier 1) and beyond the classroom (Tier 2) might look similar. The major differences between the two are the size of the instructional group (i.e., Tier 2 groups are likely smaller than Tier 1 groups) and the degree to which instruction was appropriately targeted and responsive. Because Tier 2 groups are smaller and perhaps taught by a teacher with greater expertise in addressing the needs of struggling literacy learners, instruction at Tier 2 should be more explicitly focused on meeting the specific needs of the students in the group.

A typical small-group intervention lesson in kindergarten (Tier 1 or Tier 2) consists of the following components:

- *Reading/rereading*—Depending on the students' point of development, teachers either read to the students or engage them in reading one or more emergent-level texts that were read in previous lessons.
- *Phonological analysis*—Teachers evaluate the students' status on phonological analysis skills, using a phonological skills snapshot as a guide, to determine the appropriate focus of instruction for the group. For students having some skill in phonological analysis and some familiarity with letter names and letter sounds, the phonological analysis and alphabetic segments of the lesson would be integrated.

- *Alphabetics*—Instruction follows the developmental progressions described under the alphabetics goal. Depending on the skills of the students in the group, initial instruction focuses on learning letter names and proceeds to instruction on letter sounds, word families, and other orthographic units. All skills taught in the alphabetics segment are skills that could be applied in the book(s) that the students read in the reading segment of the lesson.
- *Reading*—In every intervention session, students read one or more emergent-level texts. This segment of the lesson provides teachers with the opportunity to guide the development of the students' word-solving skills and encourage active engagement in the construction of the meaning of texts read. Prior to reading the new book for the day, teachers engage the students in thinking and talking about strategies to use in word identification. Teachers also prepare the students for reading the book(s) in a variety of ways depending on the characteristics of the book(s) and the skills of the students. Thus, teachers might provide a fairly elaborate book introduction for books that they expect will be more challenging or a more limited introduction if they believe that the students have the skills to solve the problems they will encounter while reading.

Following the book introduction, each student reads the book, and the teacher makes every effort to ensure that each student is, in fact, reading, rather than shadowing his or her neighbor's reading. As the students read, the teacher moves from student to student, engaging in brief discussions of the meaning of the text or coaching the students in the use of word-identification strategies. An overarching goal is for each student to have maximum opportunity to do the thinking that early reading entails. The teacher's varied conversations with different students convey the distinct impression that reading is not to be done in unison.

The selection of books for students to read is determined by the teacher's perceptions of what the students are able to do and what they need more practice with. In our intervention studies, we have made frequent but not exclusive use of the Ready Readers series because it systematically develops decoding skills and high-frequency sight vocabulary. Teachers reported that the progressions incorporated in these books eased the tension of selecting the right book for a given group, but at times, the series moved too fast for the students they were teaching, and they needed to seek additional books to meet their students' needs.

- *High-frequency word practice*—A small segment of each lesson is devoted to teaching and practicing high-frequency words. A variety of games are used for this purpose as is periodic review of the Words We [I] Know chart.
- *Writing*—Each lesson involves the students in a writing activity. Early on, the teacher does the writing and engages the students in as much of the writing process as possible. Thus, he or she might engage them in constructing the message, analyzing the sounds in the words to be written, deciding which letters to use to represent sounds, consulting the Words We [I] Know chart for the conventional spelling of a high-frequency word, as so on. As the students progress, the teacher turns over more of the responsibility to them.

The order of the lesson components is not fixed and is allowed to vary on the basis of teachers' perceptions of what would be optimal for the students in their groups. However, teachers are encouraged to strive to include all of the components in every small-group lesson. Most teachers have tended to follow the sequence previously described.

One-to-one intervention lessons for first graders generally consist of many of the same elements as the small-group lessons. The first major difference is that each lesson begins by engaging the students in reading one or more texts that were read in previous lessons. One purpose of the rereadings is to build fluency and confidence and thereby promote enjoyment of the reading process. The second major difference is that, for most students, the phonological analysis and alphabetic skills portions of the lesson are combined. Research suggests that once students have some insight into each aspect of the process, maximum progress is made when the processes are integrated (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The third major difference is that when students are reading shorter, emergent-level texts, they often read four or more books in a single lesson (e.g., two rereads and two new books). The teachers are frequently reminded that the more appropriately challenging reading students do, the faster they will grow as readers.

## Concluding Thoughts

The ISA represents an instructional approach appropriate for use in an RTI model, because the research evidence demonstrates its success among the types of students who often struggle in the early stages of learning to read. Research

on the approach, to date, indicates that it is effective when used in the early primary grades in classroom, small-group, and one-to-one intervention settings. A unique aspect of the approach, relative to many of the models of instruction proposed for use in RTI contexts, is the stress placed on the need for instruction to be consistent and coherent across instructional settings. Further, stress is placed on the importance of teaching foundational skills, especially phonics skills, for the purpose of facilitating text reading. Thus, the phonics skills are directly taught are taught in preparation for a book that the students will read the same day. As a result, students understand very well the use of the skills they learn in these more isolated activities.

Another unique feature of the ISA is the explicit instruction provided to support students' word solving in context and, thereby, their word learning. By explicitly teaching a small set of code-based and meaning-based strategies for word solving, and teaching students to use the strategies in an interactive and confirmatory way to become independent in the use of these strategies, we hopefully provide students with an approach to reading that will allow them to grow as readers every time they read. As discussed previously, the ability to effortlessly identify most of the words encountered in text allows readers to devote most of their cognitive energy to constructing the meaning of the text.

Instruction in the use of the word-solving strategies has helped students feel empowered as readers. It is common for us to observe students new to the ISA move from a dependent stance, wherein they frequently appeal to the teacher for assistance when they encounter a puzzling word, to a point where they are persistent and productive in their word-solving attempts and at times rather indignant if the teacher tries to step in to help them puzzle through a word ("No, no! Don't tell me!"). Of course, to engage in effective word solving, students need to actively attend to both the alphabetic information contained in the word and the meaning of the text. We feel that the need to draw on both sources of information enhances students' word solving and their understanding of text more generally.

## NOTES

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