MOVING FROM THE HOW TO WHY OF READING INSTRUCTION
GUIDED READING, LITERATURE CIRCLES, AND READING WORKSHOP
READING COMPREHENSION
PHONICS AND PHONEMIC AWARENESS FOR BEGINNING READERS
VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION
TEACHER READ-ALOUDS
WRITING WORKSHOP
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APRIL/MAY 2006 VOL. 68 NO. 4

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CORRECTION: In Sally Lam Phoon’s article in the February/March 2005 issue, the last two endnotes were inadvertently omitted. They are as follows:
24. Lederman and Neiss.
Pathways to Excellence

Erma Lee is Associate for Curriculum at the North American Division Office of Education in Silver Spring, Maryland.
I remember little about 1st grade except the battle my mother waged to ensure that I would be enrolled in Miss Burkett’s class. Rumor had it that the new teacher across the hall used a “newfangled” approach to teaching reading, in contrast to Miss Burkett’s sequential phonics method. Later, as students of both teachers sat side by side in other classrooms, I do not recall any significant differences in their ability to read.

This scene has been played out again and again, for the “reading wars,” as they have been called, have continued for decades. The actors and settings may change, but the plot—how to best teach reading—remains the same. As a result, curricula and instructional methods have proliferated. Is this war winnable?

The Office of Education of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists has addressed these issues in developing a new reading/language-arts program for its K-8 schools. To provide some background for this discussion, we will briefly trace the history of reading instruction and provide a philosophical and theoretical context for reading practice. Finally, we will examine the implications for reading instruction.

A Brief History of Reading Instruction

In countries that use an alphabet to represent written language, reading instruction began with alphabetic or phonics approaches. Over time, other methods developed. In the basal reader approach, students learn sight words as well as phonics skills and apply them to the reading of short selections of increasing difficulty. A literature or tradebook approach, which has students read real
books, has received increased emphasis in recent years. Finally, a language experience approach, which has students compose and read their own texts, has been popular, as well. Based on the success of each of these methods with some students, as well as research indicating that a combination of techniques works best, many reading educators have called for a balanced approach incorporating the best of all four methods. Recently, in the U.S., the emphasis has moved to a “research-based” approach, largely as the result of two reports on best practices in reading instruction—Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) and the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000). The No Child Left Behind legislation and the ensuing testing movement, which holds American public schools accountable for students’ reading performance, has also had an impact. Consequently, legislators in some states have passed bills mandating a certain approach.

**Paradigmatic Clarification**

In practice, then, methods of teaching vary from setting to setting due to influences such as tradition, research, and legislation. The decision to adopt one approach over another is generally made after examination of the programs’ methods and materials. This phenomenon has been described as “waves atop an otherwise still ocean.” Methodology, however, is not really the basis for the debate, for reading is more than technique. As stated by Dorothy Watson, “[reading] . . . is not a program, package, set of materials, method, practice, or technique; rather, it is a perspective on language and learning that leads to the acceptance of certain strategies, methods, materials, and techniques . . .” Judith Newman also pointed out that “[reading] . . .
isn’t an instructional approach . . . [but] a philosophical stance.”

Although the practical, “how to” features of reading are important, educators rarely think about the philosophy that informs their practice. In stressing the importance of philosophical inquiry to education, John Brubacher lamented that “too few educators could formulate or pursue such questions or give adequate responses about why things are done as they are in most schools . . . The study of philosophy of education would help educators build more adequate theoretical bases, and hence, more adequate education.”

Examining the philosophical basis for reading instruction helps to reveal underlying paradigms, since each approach is grounded in certain assumptions or beliefs. By analyzing these assumptions, educators can better understand how to address practical issues.

Therefore, teachers need to understand the philosophical assumptions and paradigms underlying each approach to reading instruction. As argued by Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: “Differences in paradigms are differences in worldviews, involving differences in assumptions made, questions asked, evidence taken, and methodologies used.” This paradigmatic vocabulary or language thus serves to contextualize theory and practice, providing a way of discussing the world, the things in the world, and the relationships among those things.

There are many diverse ways of discussing the world. Such conceptualizations, however, are generally grouped in one of two worldviews—a mechanistic or a holistic paradigm. Beginning with Rene Descartes’ and Isaac Newton’s work, Western science has viewed the world as composed of separate and independent parts—a mechanistic worldview. In the past several decades, though, many researchers in both the physical and human sciences have tried to demonstrate that “our vision . . . is undergoing a radical change toward the multiple, the temporal, and the complex”—a holistic worldview.

There is a general awareness of the limitations of the “paradigmatic boundaries” that had previously guided inquiry.
The mechanistic and holistic paradigms can be described in terms of two enabling assumptions—a longitudinal (breadth) assumption and a latitudinal (depth) assumption. The longitudinal assumption conceptualizes the universe in horizontal terms. Applied to the mechanistic paradigm, this belief projects that things exist in static states of being; applied to the holistic paradigm, this belief projects that things consist of dynamic processes or events of becoming. The latitudinal assumption identifies one state or event relative to others and implies more enduring relationships than the longitudinal assumption. Specifically, an event or state is characterized by a particular vertical configuration of parts.

**Longitudinal Nature of Reading**

Applying the longitudinal assumption to reading suggests that it is an active, dynamic process rather than a static state. With this temporal view, a linguistic structure is in a constant state of flux, which, in turn, entails movement into a new unity or whole. The creation of these temporary relationships constitutes a series of literacy events.

Furthermore, the transition from one literacy event to another is not uniform or linear; reading is not a succession of discrete linguistic structures. Rather, there is a necessary and meaningful connection between literacy events, a complex interrelationship of processes. Reading, therefore, is historically situated; there is an integration of one reading structure in the becoming of another. The present linguistic state, constituted in part by past events, is differentiated from the past by its history. Thus, because a literacy event is not independent of its history, it cannot be understood when separated from its past.

**Latitudinal Nature of Reading**

The reading process can be further conceptualized in terms of the configuration of the parts that characterize a literacy event. There is a general consensus about what is necessary for reading to take place. Three basic parts, known as cueing systems, have been identified: graphophonic or word-level cues (sound and letter patterns), syntactic or sentence-level cues (sentence patterns), and semantic or text-level cues (meanings). A literacy event, then, is characterized by a particular configuration of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic features. The organization of these parts, however, has been conceptualized in several different ways.

Traditionally, reading has been separated into irreducible, individual parts or skills (i.e., sounds, syllables, words). In this view, a linguistic structure can be understood as a synthesis of independently functioning skills. Produced by an addition of parts, literacy events are aggregates, they maintain a summative rather than a constitutive nature.

Recently, some reading educators have acknowledged the limitations of a mechanistic view, concluding that it is too fragmented to describe the dynamic nature of reading. No set of “basic building blocks” or discrete skills can be synthesized to generate a linguistic structure because a literacy event is more than the sum of its parts. Reading cannot be subdivided, for it consists of only momentary relations, which are involved in acquiring and relating new information to the whole and from which parts cannot be distinguished—“an unbroken wholeness.” Linguistic skills, therefore, have no significance in isolation; they are understood only through their integrated activity within the whole literacy event. This interde-
process of decoding or encoding. During oral reading, children must decode graphic symbols into speech; when reading silently, they must encode graphic symbols into inner speech.

Perceptual (lower-level) and cognitive (higher-level) processes are autonomous in nature, with perception preceding cognition. At each stage, the input is processed and recorded, then the information is transferred to the next level for further processing. The reading process takes on a unified character when the subskills are processed automatically.15

In top-down models, reading comprehension is influenced more by the cognitive than the perceptual processes. (See Figure 2.) Predictions concerning meaning are accepted or rejected during the processing of information. Graphic cues are used only when either validating or rejecting predictions; if graphic cues do not correspond to syntactic and semantic processing, they are not likely to be employed in the reading process.16

Despite the fact that these two models are supposed to represent the dynamic and holistic nature of the reading process, some reading educators feel that they do not accurately portray the theoretical complexity of the relations among the cueing systems. A linguistic hierarchy reduces relationships to a single dimension—parts can be related only to what is above or below them, creating a homogeneous organization of skills. A literacy event, however, is heterogenic in nature, and there is no distinction between levels, for every part is related to every other part.

Reading, in the Interactive Model, is portrayed as a dynamic web of interrelated processes. (See Figure 3.) Each part or cueing system "unfolds" the whole structure; the whole encompasses each part, and each part encompasses the whole. This model does not view either bottom-up or top-down processing as playing a dominant role in reading comprehension. Rather, there is a cyclical interaction of perceptual and cognitive processes. Each level has the potential to influence all other levels. No one part of this linguistic web has priority; all parts develop in relation with others. One relationship may assume a significant part while representing the whole, but the purpose is not to suppress the other relations.17

Implications for Reading Instruction

The "reading wars," then, will neither be resolved through research (i.e., examining practice) nor argument. The approaches espouse different worldviews. But if educators can articulate...
their philosophy and beliefs concerning reading, they will have a frame of reference from which to construct, utilize, and evaluate the most appropriate approaches to reading instruction. After clarifying their beliefs, they can move from the “how” (which focuses solely on practice) to the “why” (which focuses on the paradigm that informs their practice).

In order to link theory and practice, the NAD has adopted a holistic view of the reading process. Both the longitudinal (breadth) as well as the latitudinal (depth) aspects of reading have been considered. In terms of breadth, reading is viewed as an active, dynamic process, constituted by a series of meaningfully related literacy events. In terms of depth, a literacy event is viewed as a dynamic web of interrelated parts or cueing systems. Combining the horizontal and vertical aspects of the reading process creates an integrated whole from which meaning of written text can be derived. Simply defined, then, reading is gaining meaning from print.

There is not a direct correspondence between philosophy and practice. However, the adoption of certain beliefs does imply certain practices. First, because of its emphasis on wholeness, the NAD reading program embeds reading instruction in a total language-arts program that addresses the four modes of language (listening, speaking, reading, writing). The decision also suggest a framework for instructional as well as scheduling purposes.

**Word Work**
Phonemic Awareness
Phonics
Word Study
Spelling

**Guided Reading**
Leveled Readers/Trade Books
Comprehension
Vocabulary

**Independent Reading**
Read-Alouds
Fluency

**Writing**
Writing Workshop
Handwriting

**Recently, some reading educators have acknowledged the limitations of a mechanistic view, concluding that it is too fragmented to describe the dynamic nature of reading.**

This framework reflects the NAD’s intent to address the whole while maintaining the integrity of the relations among the parts. Many good practices already in use that exemplify this philosophy will be continued. New materials and research-based strategies will be introduced as well.

The purpose of this theme issue on reading is to provide a philosophical as well as a practical context for the new Seventh-day Adventist reading program. The ensuing articles will address critical aspects of the three cueing systems that constitute the breadth and depth of the reading process, as well as related topics. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues will also be discussed. The focus is not specifically on the various parts but why, and how, they relate to the whole.

Dr. Carol L. Campbell, the Coordinator for this special issue on reading, is an Associate Professor of Education at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. The editors express their appreciation for her careful and comprehensive work and advice in planning and preparing the issue.

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16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
This past summer, I had the privilege of taking part in the North American Division (NAD) Office of Education Elementary Reading Textbook Revision Committee. The focus of the committee was to create a new reading series that meets the standards of the NAD and that reflects current research on literacy. The NAD has been working with a publisher, Kendall/Hunt, in Dubuque, Iowa, to produce a new curriculum that is specifically designed to meet the spiritual and cultural requirements of our schools as well as the literacy needs of our students. It is the purpose of this article to familiarize teachers with terms and practices that will make the implementation of this new curriculum as effective as possible.

Curriculum materials and instructional strategies have been selected that foster independent reading skills and a lifelong love of reading. One specific area that is being addressed is the best method for reading skill instruction. Sev-

Guided Reading, Literature Circles, and Reading Workshop

BY LISA M. WRIGHT
eral methods have been identified, supported by research-based “best practices,” that will be easy to adapt in classrooms with a wide range of reading abilities and/or grade levels. These formats are, in many ways, similar to methods already being used in many of our schools. However, some changes are being made to reflect what we currently know about successful reading instruction. This article will focus on three suggested formats for the delivery of reading instruction: Guided Reading, Literature Circles, and Reading Workshop.

**Guided Reading**

Guided Reading is the heart of the reading program. It is in many ways similar to the basal reading lessons in the current NAD reading program. According to Cunningham, Hall, and Sigmom, “In Guided Reading, teachers choose material for children to read and a purpose for reading, and then guide them to use reading strategies needed for that material and that purpose.” The main focus is on the development of comprehension strategies. “When you read, you do two things simultaneously—you say the words, and you ‘think about’ what you are reading. Saying the words aloud (or to yourself if you are reading silently) is the word identification part of reading. Understanding the meaning the words convey is the comprehension part.”

Fountas and Pinnell provide an outline for the Guided Reading process in *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children.* During Guided Reading, the teacher meets with small groups of students of similar reading ability for direct instruction in reading, while other students work independently in learning centers. Instructional-level materials may include basal readers, anthologies, trade books, big books, magazines, etc. The lesson plan usually incorporates “before,” “during,” and “after” reading segments, with the “before” and “after” sections lasting about five minutes and the “during” segment lasting 15-20 minutes.

During the “before” phase, the teacher introduces the book or text. To facilitate comprehension, he or she may take the students on a “picture walk” through the book or have them examine the cover to connect the students’ prior knowledge and personal experiences to what they will be reading. As they look at the pictures together, they try to predict what the story will be about. This gets students engaged and asking questions, and heightens interest in the book. A teacher may ask questions to set a purpose for reading and to build anticipation. Sometimes, the teacher engages in specific comprehension strategy instruction by having students use picture cues, read to the end of the sentence and re-read, summarize, use sound-letter or rhyming cues, and “chunking” or breaking the word apart. During this time, the teacher may also introduce new vocabulary and familiarize the students with any unfamiliar concepts in the book.

During the second segment of the Guided Reading lesson, the “during” phase, students take turns reading the
During Guided Reading, the teacher meets with small groups of students of similar reading ability for direct instruction in reading, while other students work independently in learning centers.

This enables the struggling reader to comprehend and enjoy more difficult text without slowing down the reading process.

During the third or “after” phase of the lesson, the students engage in closure activities. During discussion of the text, students are asked to connect the story to their own lives. The teacher may also review skills and strategies introduced in segment one or assign written extension activities such as response to the story, keeping a journal, or interactive writing. During interactive writing, the group composes a piece together, usually recorded by the teacher on large chart paper. As the teacher records the students’ responses, the students fill in words, letters, or punctuation. Other activities include art, sketching, drama, reader’s theatre, and graphic organizers.

Below is a sample Guided Reading lesson for 1st graders using the book Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?3

BEFORE:
1. Introduce the book. Read the title and the author’s name (Bill Martin, Jr.). Ask “Can you guess who the illustrator is?” (Eric Carle)
2. Talk about the book. “This is like a song or poem about animals of different colors.”

3. Conduct a picture walk, reading a few pages aloud.

4. Introduce vocabulary and comprehension strategy “What pattern do you see in this book? What keeps repeating?” Review sight words on index cards they are to use later in their writing: what, do, you, see, I, at, me. Notice the rhyming words see and me.

DURING:
5. Teacher reads book to students.
7. Teacher takes notes while students are reading.

AFTER:
8. Students respond to the story by placing felt pieces about the story on a board as the teacher rereads the story.
9. Students write a new line to the story and illustrate it, i.e., “Lion, lion, what do you see? I see a yellow cheetah looking at me.” “Green fox, green fox, what do you see? I see a lion looking at me.” These pages can be bound into a new book for classroom use.
10. Read a related book such as Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?

Literature Circles
Students need to practice the skills and strategies introduced in Guided Reading. Literature Circles, small groups (three to six students) that are formed around a particular text choice, are one way students can apply what they have learned. Materials may include trade books, both fiction and nonfiction, poetry, content texts, magazine articles, etc. Typically, the teacher puts together sets of materials (four to six copies) that are related by a common theme or author. Students choose which text to read, and all students reading a common text are grouped together. (Schlick Noe’s Website contains many helpful tools for literature circles.)

The Literature Circle format is very simple, yet fosters learning. Students are assigned a chapter or chunk of text to read individually and are asked to bring their responses to the discussion circle. The students must make preparation through their responses so they have something to bring to the discussion. The better prepared their responses, the better the discussion and more learning that occurs. Prompts are one example of a response. Students are asked to complete prompts such as: “I thought . . . ,” “I liked . . . ,” “I wonder . . . ,” “I felt . . . ,” “I noticed . . . ,” “I predict . . . ,” “A connection is . . . ,” “My favorite person is . . . ,” “A question I have is . . . ,” “If I could change . . . .”

Students may also be given Post-It notes to write down ideas, words that
are interesting or that they do not know, and favorite quotes or questions to bring to their group. They don’t have to write in the book and can find the quotes easily, as the Post-It serves as a bookmark, too. Making and decorating bookmarks based on certain chapters of the book is a traditional response in Literature Circles as well and encourages student creativity. It can be done at the beginning or end of the book as part of a celebration.

Discussion logs are perhaps one of the most important components of the Literature Circle. Using these record sheets, students enter their name, the date, which chapter they are reading, and a written response such as a list of words they wonder about, questions they have, or how the story relates to their lives, to something going on in the world, or to something else in the book. Responses can be as simple as a journal entry for each chapter. A variety of responses can be used throughout the reading of the text. This format can be applied across the curriculum in Bible, science, or social studies.

I really enjoyed using this format with my upper-grade students when we read the book A Thousand Shall Fall by Susi Hasel Mundy. The students asked many thought-provoking questions, learned interesting answers to them, and acquired new vocabulary. Most importantly, they learned from one another. There were moments when discussion stopped and they weren’t sure of themselves, and moments when I wasn’t sure of myself, but when they had new insights to share, they really shone. I particularly enjoyed this experience because it allowed me to shed the role of “Container of All Knowledge and Wisdom,” and put the power in the students’ hands. I finally understood the meaning of teacher as facilitator, and was reminded that truth belongs to all of us, not just to those in authority.

Reading Workshop

During Reading Workshop, emergent readers may choose what they want to read. Using Reading Workshop in conjunction with Guided Reading or Reading instruction as well as an opportunity for students to apply what they learn in Literature Circles and/or Reading Workshop. Some teachers have found success in merging the Literature Circles and Reading Workshop. Another option is to integrate Literature Circles into content-area subjects such as science, social studies, or Bible. Every instructional plan should address both strategy instruction as well as practice in a variety of formats, as it draws students closer to God and inspires a lifelong love of reading.

**Discussion logs are perhaps one of the most important components of the Literature Circle.**

Literature Circles has been found to be more effective than a Guided Reading program alone, especially for struggling readers. In addition, it helps students who have not developed a love for reading, but who possess strong reading skills. Its strength lies in its allowing students to self-select their reading, for research shows that choice increases motivation. Furthermore, it helps students concentrate on comprehension or gaining meaning from the text. They develop fluency and confidence as they read material on their independent reading level.

Below is a sample format for Reading Workshop:

**Teacher Read-Aloud:**
The teacher reads aloud to students from a variety of materials, including different genres, themes, and authors.

**Children Reading:**
Students self-select books or other materials on their own reading level to read independently.

**Children Sharing:**
Several students share what they are reading with their classmates.

To adapt Reading Workshop to multigrade classrooms and a variety of reading levels, Cunningham, Hall, and Sigmon recommend teaching young children, in particular, three ways to read:

- “Pretend read” by telling the story of a familiar storybook;
- “Picture read” by looking at a book about real things with lots of pictures and talking about all the things you see in the pictures; and
- “Read by reading all the words.”

**Conclusion**

Teachers need to provide Guided Reading instruction as well as an opportunity for students to apply what they learn in Literature Circles and/or Reading Workshop. Some teachers have found success in merging the Literature Circles and Reading Workshop. Another option is to integrate Literature Circles into content-area subjects such as science, social studies, or Bible. Every instructional plan should address both strategy instruction as well as practice in a variety of formats, as it draws students closer to God and inspires a lifelong love of reading.

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2. Patricia M. Cunningham, Dorothy P. Hall, and James W. Cunningham, Guided Reading the Four-Blocks Way (Greensboro: Carson-Dellosa, 2000), p. 43.
How Can I Help My Students Who Struggle With Reading Comprehension?

David* is in the 8th grade. His test results indicate that his oral reading ability for word analysis (decoding) is instructional level** using 1st-grade reading materials. His tested oral reading rate and oral reading comprehension test scores show that he can handle 3rd-grade reading materials at an instructional level. Yet, the results of his silent reading comprehension test indicate an independent reading level using 8th-grade reading materials. David has good receptive vocabulary, but has problems with expressive vocabulary, both written and verbal.

Jill* is in the 2nd grade. She cannot read even 10 percent of her Dolch Sight Words, indicating a significant concern in the area of word recognition. Jill does know the names of her letters, the sounds of beginning consonants, and short and long vowel sounds. However, she does not know her ending consonants or the CVC/-CVCe patterns. Jill also has problems with rhyming, and when reading text orally, demonstrates word-by-word prosody. When the teacher uses 1st-grade materials to test Jill’s oral reading comprehension, the results indicate that she is functioning on a frustration reading level.

Matt* is in the 11th grade. His journey through the school system has been difficult. Matt reads well; however, he is a “word-caller.” He knows all of his Dolch Sight Words, so clearly he has no problems with word-recognition skills. He also has good phone-
mic awareness and can apply phonics and word analysis to almost any text.

Matt’s reading rate, both oral and silent, matches that of his peers. However, results of his comprehension tests indicate that for him to be successful, classroom materials will have to be at a 4th-grade level, whether he reads them orally or silently, or hears them read aloud.

**Reading and Comprehension Defined**

Each of these students has a comprehension problem. Their needs are different due to the complexity of the reading comprehension process. A precise definition of reading and reading comprehension will help teachers understand how to choose appropriate classroom interventions for individual needs.

How is reading defined? Reutzel and Cooter asked their university students what reading meant. Here are some of the responses:

“I think reading is when you make the sounds of the letters and put them together to make words.”

“Reading is understanding what is on the page.”

“Phonics is the first part of reading and comprehension is the last.”

These students did grasp the fundamentals of reading—taking words apart and putting them back together to understand the whole. However, it is not a simple process, though it seems so for those who are adept at it.

Reading text requires an interactive and complex process of (1) decoding, the use of symbol/sound associations, (2) word recognition, the ability to instantly associate a printed word with its spoken corresponding word, (3) encoding, transforming phonologically coded information into a semantic code for storage in long-term memory, which is related to impairments in short-term (working) memory, and (4) information retrieval, which can be related to memory capacity, prior knowledge, and a host of other variables such as central executive function. A competent reader applies a coordinated structure of knowledge and
skills concurrently, using a number of interrelated information sources, in order to gain meaning.2

The most important skill in reading is constructing meaning. Success in this area depends upon many factors: text structure understanding, vocabulary comprehension, use of prior knowledge, the ability to focus on comprehension rather than decoding (in order to read with confidence and fluency), and the value the reader places on the process of completing the task.3 Keene and Zimmerman liken the comprehension process to “a mosaic constructed of diverse pieces, each integral to the whole, each essential to the texture of learning.”4

Relevance in Schools Today

Although teaching students to read remains a prime objective in U.S. schools, a 2000 U.S. Department of Education study indicated that “approximately 37% of fourth-grade students did not achieve at the most basic reading level on a recent national test.”5 Societal trends such as increased immigration, the elimination of tracking systems in U.S. schools, and the inclusion movement have increased the number of classrooms with ethnic, linguistic, and academic diversity. The average public elementary classroom in the U.S. contains 22 students who, in one minute, can read between 0 and 183 words correctly. Teachers respond to this diversity in a number of ways, the worst of which is to ignore it and/or plan their instruction to reach the “average student.”6

Although today’s high-stakes testing requires that students achieve excellent comprehension in all academic areas, comprehension is usually not expressly taught. In 2000, the National Reading Panel Report outlined five critical reading skills areas. One of these was text comprehension strategies. Research has acknowledged the necessity of early intervention using the alphabetic principle in order to improve word-level decoding and reading. However, there are still many “word callers” who can read whole words yet struggle with comprehension skills because they do not understand the meaning of the text.7

Good readers bring an internalized set of expectations to the reading process, a “reader’s rudder” they use to ensure that they comprehend the content. They self-monitor what they read and demand that the material “make sense.” A poor reader’s inadequate silent reading comprehension skills frequently go unnoticed because teachers usually assess these skills by listening to children read aloud. Thus, many teachers do not recognize that students are underperforming in this important area and lack a “reader’s rudder.”8

The “reader’s rudder” is the metacognitive component of reading comprehension. Students with strong metacognitive reading skills are actively aware of how well they comprehend what they are reading, and are able to organize, direct, and evaluate their own cognitive abilities. Several strategies can be used to improve metacognition by teaching students how to monitor their comprehension. This improves their strategic processing of material and encourages them to become active readers.9

Since reading comprehension depends upon the mastery of reading preskills, how important is it to teach reading comprehension rather than the preskills? Many teachers ask this question, and in fact, reading comprehension skills are frequently left untaught for this reason. Opitz and Eldridge, however, stress a critical point in reading instruction, “Comprehension is the essence of reading . . . it has to be taught and cannot be left to chance!”10 Mastropieri and Scruggs echo this sentiment, “reading comprehension requirements increase substantially as students progress through school.”11

Comprehension instruction will be an integral part of the new reading/language-arts program that will be introduced in North American Adventist schools this fall. The instructional framework for this program recommends that comprehension instruction take place during the Guided Reading segment. Mini-lessons in comprehension strategies, conducted during the “Before” segment of the Guided Reading lesson, will teach the critical skills necessary for students to create meaning from text.

Reading Comprehension Interventions

Reading comprehension interventions can significantly improve students’ academic performance.12 Two approaches are supported by research: (a) small, interactive instructional grouping; and (b) specific format teaching to help students generate self-monitoring text questions.13 Small interactive instructional grouping strategies include Coop-Dis-Q, PALS, and POSSE. Specific format teaching strategies include techniques such as visual-spatial organization of passage content, in-text mnemonic illustrations, instructional study guides, Multi-Pass, and metacognitive instruction.

Small Interactive Instructional Grouping

Coop-Dis-Q consists of five steps that combine cooperative learning, discussion, and questioning. The teacher should actively participate in and moderate the discussion, modeling all behaviors expected from students. The recommended procedure is as follows:

1. Create the groups: Choose five to six students for each heterogeneous or homogeneous group.
2. Prepare a set of questions: After carefully considering the essential information in the reading passage, formulate questions on different cognitive
levels (literal, inferential, critical).

3. Groups discuss the story and divide questions: Organize the groups and begin a general discussion of the reading. Following the discussion, provide the groups with questions written on strips of paper. Subdivide the groups into triads to facilitate more discussion.

4. Triads discuss, answer, and add questions: Have each group choose a scribe, while encouraging all students to take notes and generate new questions or ideas.

5. Triads present and discuss their answers: Ask members from each triad to rejoin their original group and discuss their answers to the teacher’s questions. Each group is to form a consensus answer for each question, which will be reported to the class by individuals assigned this role. The group may add questions and answers if they wish.14

PALS stands for Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy, which has proved effective in reading and math. It can transform instruction through the use of routines that improve reading comprehension and other reading skills. Students are paired, with each duo consisting of a high-performing and a low-performing student. Tutoring roles are reciprocal. The higher-performing student reads first, modeling the desired oral reading behavior. Because the first reader is higher performing than his or her partner, the text is on the independent reading level for this student; therefore, oral reading of the text should not present any problems for the high-performing student. The text used is at the lower-performing student’s instructional reading level.15

Students are also assigned to group teams where they earn points for cooperative effort and achievement. Every four weeks, the teacher assigns new pairs and teams. The PALS session includes three activities:

1. Partner reading: Each student reads the text aloud for five minutes. Then for two minutes, the lower performer retells the sequence of what was read.

2. Paragraph shrinking: One student reads aloud, a paragraph at a time, then pauses to identify who or what, and to state the main idea of the paragraph in 11 words or less. After five minutes, the students switch roles.

3. Prediction relay: Students enlarge the paragraph shrinking described above to larger chunks of text. This activity requires students to make predictions and check them for accuracy after reading. Students switch roles after five minutes.16
POSSE was originally developed and validated by Englert and Mariage and has since been replicated. The acronym stands for Predicting, Organizing, Searching, Summarizing, and Evaluating. During the reading comprehension period, students take turns leading a small-group discussion. They assume the role of teacher by asking relevant questions about the text. Cue cards provide students with practice and application activities until they achieve mastery. The application steps are:

1. Predicting ideas from prior knowledge,
2. Organizing predictions based on the forthcoming text structure,
3. Searching for the main ideas,
4. Summarizing the main ideas within the text structure, and
5. Evaluating comprehension.

**Specific Format Teaching**

Visual-spatial organization provides a “code” that depicts passage content and interrelationships. Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, and Baker say that knowledge of “text structure” or “story grammar” is essential for comprehension. Using arrows, lines, colors, and spatial arrangements of text content allows the students to construct their own understanding of the story grammar. This activity helps students to focus on relevant information and to link previous knowledge with the newly learned information, thereby enhancing recall.

Mnemonic illustrations can help students remember important facts by linking new information to something familiar through the use of visual cues. For example, the “keyword strategy” is a commonly used mnemonic device to promote vocabulary development. The student remembers the definition of a new word by relating it to a familiar word or “keyword” through the aid of an illustration. For instance, to remember the meaning of the word *goatee* (beard), a student might use a picture of a beard on a goat. Because most reading textbooks do not include mnemonic strategies, they must be overtly taught.

Instructional study guides help students focus on critical information and relationships. The guides serve as adjunct aids rather than independent learning guides. The activities should be scheduled to occur before, during, and after text reading. Some ideas to include: semantic charts, interactive vocabulary procedures, predictive and evaluative questions, and self-monitoring for comprehension accuracy. Instructional approaches that increase the reader’s cognitive engagement during reading thereby enhance comprehension and learning. The planned comprehension activities should transform thinking rather than merely inform knowledge.

MultiPass, a strategy similar to SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review), prompts students to progress through the reading material three times. Here are the instructions that are given to students:

1. **Survey Pass:** Become familiar with the text organization and main ideas in the chapter. Search for relationships to previous learning and summarize in your own words.
2. **Size-up Pass:** Read questions provided in the chapter/ at the end of a section or chapter, skimming the material to find the answers. Paraphrase the answers without prompts.
3. **Sort-out Pass:** Conduct a self-assessment of the chapter content to ensure that you understand it and can remember its content.

Students who learn how to use self-monitoring significantly boost their reading comprehension achievement. A necessary component of comprehending what one reads is the ability to reflect on a skill and to examine and evaluate how well one is using it. For students to do this, they...
Several strategies can be used to improve metacognition by teaching students how to monitor their comprehension.

must be taught to notice how well they comprehend and then provided with “repair strategies” when they realize that they do not understand the text. This is referred to as “comprehension monitoring” and involves reader meta-cognition. Metacognitive instruction overtly teaches how to apply a strategy to text and provides structured practice. Systematic teacher monitoring and feedback must be provided until the student achieves mastery. At this point, teacher support can fade as the student assumes responsibility for his or her own learning.

Throughout the process, it is important for the teacher to model and observe how students use metacognitive strategies. The purpose is to get students to use a deliberate and active processing procedure to attack the text and to remind them to monitor their comprehension as they read.

Many metacognitive strategies encourage students to think aloud about what they have read. Verbalizing what they are thinking helps them to integrate information from different parts of the text, build their metacognitive skills, and improve their comprehension. Most researchers agree that one significant explanation for poor comprehension is students’ failure to read strategically and to spontaneously monitor their own understanding. Metacognitive instruction’s success can be attributed to its more overt method of structuring comprehension activities, which forces students to think. This approach provides them with helpful hints through the use of questions and/or steps that guide their judgment and engage them in the application of comprehension strategies. Two such strategies have been described in this article: POSSE and MultiPass.

Conclusion

Improving student reading comprehension should be the goal of every teacher. Over the years, numerous interventions have been proposed, researched, corroborated, and employed to achieve this goal. What can the teacher do for David, Jill, and Matt, the hypothetical students described at the beginning of this article?

Eighth-grader David would benefit from a reading comprehension program that included PALS and visual-spatial organization of passage content. This method would pair him with someone who could model reading comprehension using reading materials on his instructional reading level. The visual-spatial method would use his receptive vocabulary strengths to build his expression vocabulary.
Second-grader Jill's reading comprehension program should include Coop-Dis-Q and the use of study guides to increase her metacognitive skills. The Cooperative Discussion activities will build her comprehension skills in a non-threatening and socially accepting atmosphere. The study guide will provide her with tools to build the specific skills she needs to work on, while at the same time teaching her to self-monitor and evaluate her own performance.

Eleventh-grader Matt definitely could improve his reading comprehension through the use of POSSE, Multi-Pass, and study guides that include visual-spatial organization tools and metacognitive self-monitoring strategies. The teacher's biggest challenges will be teaching Matt how to think about what he is reading and how to self-monitor his comprehension in small chunks, rather than waiting until the end of a large section of text.

Changing to a new reading program takes time and hard work; however, the new strategies will provide him with tools to build the acceptance atmosphere. The study guide and visual-spatial organization tools and study guides that include visual-spatial organization tools and metacognitive self-monitoring strategies will provide him with tools to build the foundation for improving his reading skills.

### Glossary

**Alphabetic Principle:** Understanding, at least implicitly, that a letter (the minimal unit of print) represents a phoneme (the minimal unit of speech) rather than a unit of meaning.

**Central Executive Function:** The term psychologists use to describe self-regulation—the ability to problem solve and control one's emotions.

**CVC Pattern:** A consonant-vowel-consonant letter pattern in a word.

**CVCe Pattern:** A consonant-vowel-consonant-e letter pattern in a word.

**Dolch Sight Words:** A list of 200 frequently used words that E. W. Dolch believed should be mastered by 3rd grade. Many of these words cannot be sounded out because they do not follow decoding rules.

**Expressive Vocabulary:** Speaking and writing (all the words that a person can use appropriately in speaking and writing).

**Frustration Reading Level:** The level at which a child's reading skills break down. Fluency disappears, word-recognition errors are numerous, comprehension is faulty, recall is sketchy, and signs of emotional tension and discomfort become evident.

**Heterogeneous:** diverse, assorted, mixed (e.g., different reading levels; both genders).

**Homogeneous:** uniform, identical, all the same (e.g., same reading level; only girls or boys).

**In-Text Mnemonic Illustration:** A memorization strategy where a picture is devised to represent the meaning of a new vocabulary word. The child draws the picture on a piece of paper and places it next to the word in the book (e.g., *aloft* means "high in the air"). The student pictures "a leaf" blown high in the air, which sounds similar to *aloft* and reminds him of its meaning.

**Independent Reading Level:** The highest reading level at which a child can read easily and fluently without assistance, with few word-recognition errors, and with good comprehension and recall.

**Instructional Reading Level:** The highest level at which a child can do satisfactory reading with teacher preparation and supervision: word-recognition errors are not frequent, and comprehension and recall are satisfactory.

**Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to discriminate among the sounds that make up the English language, such as comparing *pan, pen, pin, and pun.*
ever, it is well worth the effort, considering the potential for student improvement. Six essential steps are necessary to create a strong reading comprehension program:

1. Create an inviting learning community using books at appropriate reading levels and on topics that are of interest to your students.
2. Communicate your own passion about reading.
3. Use direct instruction and modeling to show students how to engage in the assigned tasks—for example, talk about how to think aloud, and provide many opportunities for students to become engaged in the reading process (peer tutoring, visual-spatial organization, vocabulary development, study guides).
4. Provide multiple opportunities for guided practice while gradually encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and independently use the comprehension skills they have mastered.
5. Collect and use student assessment data to monitor and modify instruction using line graphs and goal setting each time practice occurs. Use approaches validated by data derived from student assessments.
6. Celebrate students’ success and encourage them to reflect upon and share techniques that work for them.  

Remember that under the façade of the unwilling reader is an individual who truly desires to learn and enjoy reading as much as the other students in your classroom. It is your responsibility to nurture that desire by building upon small successes.

Even though specific techniques and strategies are essential to reading acquisition and improvement and have been proven effective by research, the most important tool you have is prayer. God and His love in your classroom can multiply all of your methods and hard work. Using reading strategies, without prayer, for a student having significant difficulty can be compared to providing health care to an individual with a broken leg, but not giving him a pair of crutches to use during the healing process. Use prayer daily to reach the seemingly unreachable.

It is your most powerful technique. With it and the application of proven methods, you will be able to reach all your Davids, Jills, and Matts.

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This article was peer reviewed.

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Claudia knew that she could never pull off the old-fashioned kind of running away. That is, running away in the heat of anger with a knapsack on her back. She didn’t like discomfort; even picnics were untidy and inconvenient: all those insects and the sun melting the icing on the cupcakes. Therefore, she decided that her leaving home would not be just running from somewhere but would be running to somewhere. To a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place.

Thus begin the adventures of Claudia and her brother Jamie in From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiller by E. L. Konigsburg. You’ll have to read the book if you want to know where they run to and what kind of adventures they have.

For many years in Seventh-day Adventist schools, reading has been taught in a very traditional, teacher-directed way with anthologies and workbooks. Have you ever thought about running away from the traditional approach? Departing from tradition can be uncomfortable and scary. If well planned, however, it

BY THERESA J. ROBIDOUX
can be an exciting adventure. Simply plan to go “to a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place.”

Literature circles can be just such a place. “A literature circle, simply defined, is an opportunity for a small group of students to come together for the purpose of sharing or talking about a novel, short story, or some other literary experience.”

To a Large Place
You may be asking, “Where would I begin?” The research and resources on teaching reading can be a large and intimidating place. The Literature Circles Resource Center at Seattle University gives a wonderful overview of literature circles and how to get them started in your classroom. They host a Website at http://www.litcircles.org. In addition to their own information, they list a number of links to other Websites and a list of books to help get you started.

The North American Division (NAD) Office of Education has produced a number of Seventh-day Adventist Literature Guides that will be helpful. There are guides for various grade levels and books. These simple guides provide author information, a short summary, discussion questions, and related activities.

To a Comfortable Place
Chances are that if you try something and it feels uncomfortable, you will stop doing it. So, be sure that you are comfortable with your choice as you depart from the traditional approach. Start slowly and use what you know and love. Ask yourself:

• Do I read aloud to my students

“A literature circle, simply defined, is an opportunity for a small group of students to come together for the purpose of sharing or talking about a novel, short story, or some other literary experience.”

(of all ages) daily?

• Do I have my students read self-selected books silently for a sustained period of time each day?
• Do I use trade books to teach reading?

If you answered No to any of the questions above, these ideas may be something you could try.

Choose a book that you have read and love—your enthusiasm will readily transfer to your students. Be sure to begin with motivational activities. In my classroom, when we read Water Sky by Jean Craighead George, the students couldn’t wait to get their hands on the books and read after our pre-reading activities.

To an Indoor Place

Your classroom is where students come to learn to read. Make it a literature-rich environment by filling it with as many quality books as you can. However, use caution in choosing literature for your classroom. Gateway to Reading is a wonderful resource for good quality literature.

Set up your classroom in a way that encourages students to read. You could bring in an old comfy couch, beanbag chairs, or oversized pillows. Create a special corner or zone especially for reading. Make it inviting to the students, where the only thing they are allowed to do is read.

To a Beautiful Place

Nothing is more satisfying than a class of happy students. They may look forward to silent reading time if they know that afterwards, they will have a few minutes to talk with a partner or small group about what they read.

As you read aloud to your class, they may beg you to read a new chapter each day so they can see what happens next.

As the room fills with writing, projects, and activities that students have produced, reading will become more exciting and rewarding for them.

Fill your knapsack and get ready to run away from the traditional approach. It will be a great adventure! Have fun! ☀️

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Koi, a charming 6-year-old, has been in the United States for three years. An ESL (English as a second language) student, she is now enrolled in a multigrade classroom in the Pacific Northwest. Even though Koi speaks English fluently, she had a difficult time with phonemic awareness in kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher felt she was ready socially and intellectually for 1st grade, despite her phonemic awareness deficit.

By participating in various oral phonemic awareness activities in kindergarten and 1st grade and using invented spelling in her daily journal writing, Koi was able to develop phonemic awareness. It was a sudden breakthrough. One week, Koi still needed a parent volunteer to segment words for her to blend so that she could write phonemically in her journal. The next week she wrote phonetically “When the opera lady sings, she breaks the glass” for her “-ing” word family sentences in spelling class—all by herself! She was able to transfer her decoding skills to other language-arts activities. Koi was on her way; she was able to read orally and do written work independently because she had broken the code!

Phonemic awareness and phonics enabled Koi to make sense of the English alphabetic system. The California Reading Program Advisory states: “The lack of phonemic awareness is the most powerful determinant of the likelihood of failure to learn to read because of its importance in learning the English alphabetic system or in learning how print represents spoken words. If children cannot hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, they have an extremely difficult time learning how to map those sounds to letters and letter patterns—the essence of decoding.”¹

The Difference Between Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

Phonemic awareness has been defined as recognition that sounds make up the English language, and that the words we speak are each composed of individual sounds. Children need to be encouraged to pay attention to the sounds of words, separate from meaning.² Phonics is based on the premise that words can be decoded into sounds. When they study phonics, students learn spelling-to-sound correspondence.³

Rog states, “Phonemic awareness is not phonics. Phonemic awareness is an understanding about the structures and patterns of spoken language. Phonics, on the other hand, refers to the connection between letters and spoken sounds.” Spiegel adds: “Phonemic awareness is a con-
consciousness of sounds as entities that can be blended and taken apart and manipulated. Phonemic awareness includes the ability to use sounds. It is different from knowing about sounds, which may be what is taught in a traditional phonics program. The focus of this article, then, will be the importance of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in teaching beginning reading.

Five Levels of Phonemic Awareness

Marilyn J. Adams, in her landmark 1990 review of reading research, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*, established that there are five basic levels of phonemic awareness:

- Oral rhyming
- Oddity tasks
- Oral blending
- Oral phoneme segmentation
- Phoneme manipulation

These levels move from the simplest to the most complex. Likewise, the research-based activities that support and develop them also become progressively more complex.

Phonemic Awareness Instruction and Activities

Hallie and Ruth Yopp, in their *Reading Teacher* article “Supporting Phonemic Awareness Development in the Classroom,” discussed some aspects of phonemic awareness instruction and activities. They recommend that phonemic awareness instruction and activities should be developmentally appropriate, “playful and engaging, interactive and social, and should stimulate curiosity and experimentation with language.” They recommend using songs, chants, and word play games to enhance students’ awareness of the sound structure of language. Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp warn that “Few young children spontaneously acquire phonemic awareness. But when teachers plan activities and interact so as to draw attention to the phonemes in spoken words, children’s awareness develops.”

Level 1

In level one, oral rhyming, students decide whether words rhyme. To help develop students develop oral rhyming skills, the teacher can use an activity like “Extend the Rhyme,” where he or she says three rhyming words (frog, log, jog) and asks the students to provide other words that rhyme with those...
Hallie and Ruth Yopp . . . recommend that phonemic awareness instruction and activities should be developmentally appropriate, “playful and engaging, interactive and social, and should stimulate curiosity and experimentation with language.”

words (dog, hog, etc.). Much of children’s literature brims with rhyme, alliteration, and word play. Literature with predictable rhythms and rhyme patterns can be used as a springboard. Students are often able to supply words to complete the sentence. Some children can make up their own silly rhymes based on the pattern of the picture book.

Level 2

In level two, oddity tasks, students find similarities or differences between initial, ending, and medial sounds. Activities that help develop these skills include games such as “Stand, Sit, and Turn Around,” where the teacher says a sound, such as /f/, and all the students whose names start with the /f/ sound stand up, turn around, jump, clap, or do some other designated action. Teachers can also ask students to make hand signals each time they hear a word that begins with a designated sound in a read-aloud book.

Level 3

Level three, oral blending, requires students to identify words in which the phonemes have been separated. One activity that helps students practice oral blending is the game “Put It Together.” Using a puppet as a prop, the teacher tells the students that the puppet likes to say only complete words. The teacher says a word in parts, then the students “guess” the word. The puppet restates the complete word and models blending as needed. Another oral blending activity is sung to the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” The class sings:

If you think you know this word, shout it out!
If you think you know this word, shout it out!
If you think you know this word, Then tell me what you’ve heard,
If you think you know this word, shout it out!

The teacher says a segmented word such as /w/-/f/-/f/, and the students shout out the blended word, wig.

Level 4

In level four, phonemic segmentation, students are asked to say in order each sound in a word. One activity that helps develop phoneme segmentation is “Segmentation Cheer.”

Teacher: Listen to my cheer, then shout the words you hear.

Cat! Cat! Cat! Let’s take apart the word cat!

Give me the beginning sound.
Students: /c/!
Teacher: Give me the middle sound.
Students: /a/!
Teacher: Give me the ending sound.
Students: /t/!
Teacher: That’s right!
Students: /c/-/a/-/t/! Cat! Cat! Cat!

Each time the teacher says the cheer, he or she changes the words in the second line.

Level 5

In level five, phoneme manipulation, students change words by adding, deleting, or moving a phoneme. One activity to help develop phoneme manipulation is “Picture Search.” The teacher turns to different pages in a picture book and says the name of an object, animal, or person in the picture, but leaves out the first phoneme.

For a picture of a fish, he or she would say “-ish.” The students would supply the missing phoneme /f/. Phoneme manipulation also works with songs such as “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” where the words merrily, merrily, merrily are changed to nonsense words such as werrily, carrily, tarrily, etc.

An Important Link

Phonemic awareness is an important link to reading instruction. It is not meaningful in and of itself. In The Phonological Awareness Handbook for Kindergarten and Primary Teachers, Er- icson and Juliebo state, “Numerous studies have shown that phonological awareness teaching programs that include letter-name and letter-sound correspondence have a greater positive impact on reading development than interventions involving phonological awareness or sound-letter instruction alone.” The California Reading Program Advisory determined, “After children have demonstrated initial levels of phonemic awareness, both phonemic awareness and phonics can be taught simultaneously. At this point, it is also essential that both phonemic awareness and phonics be mutually reinforced in the context of integrated, shared reading and writing activities.”

Is Phonics Here to Stay?

According to Hall, Prevatte, and Cunningham: “Phonics instruction is clearly important because one of the big tasks of beginning readers is to figure out how our alphabetic language works. Adams reviewed decades of research and concluded that while some children can figure out the letter-sound system without instruction, directly teaching this system speeds up the literacy acquisition.”

At one time, the field of reading was embroiled in the “Great Debate” over which was best, the phonetic approach or the whole-word approach to early reading instruction. This debate spawned some major research initiatives. The current debate no longer centers around the value of phonics instruction—that has been accepted—but which approaches to teaching
phonic relationships are the most effective.25

Traditionally, there have been four basic approaches to teaching phonics:

- Implicit (analytic, incidental, contextual)
- Embedded (incidental, discovery)
- Explicit (synthetic)
- Analogic (phonograms, word families)

Current educational research supports the use of explicit and analogic approaches to phonics instruction. The California Reading Program Advisory found that “The most effective phonics instruction is explicit—that is, taking care to clarify key points and principles for students. In addition, it is systematic—that is, it gradually builds from basic elements to more subtle and complex patterns. The goal is to convey the logic of the system and to invite its extension to new words that the children will encounter on their own.”

In 1997, the U.S. Congress asked the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of various methods of beginning reading instruction. After two years of reviewing research-based reports, the National Reading Panel concluded that “the detailed analysis of studies involving phonics instruction revealed that systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read.”26

Why Not Use the Implicit or Embedded Approaches?

In implicit or analytic phonics instruction, the teacher does not present sounds in isolation from words. Hempentall argues that “teachers who limit their instruction to pointing out word parts to students in the context of authentic literature as the situation arises (incidental or analytic phonics) create particular problems for at-risk students.”29

The embedded phonics approach, a subtype of the implicit approach, attempts to teach reading skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading. Instruction tends to rely on incidental or discovery learning. The embedded approach “assumes that students will develop a self-sustaining, natural, unique reading style that integrates the use of contextual and grapho-phonic cues, without the possibly disabling influence (it is argued) of systematic instruction.”30 Current research does not support either the implicit or embedded approaches to teaching phonics.

Explicit Phonics Instruction and Activities

Explicit phonics refers to the synthesis or building up of phonics skills from their smallest unit.31 The teacher presents the skills sequentially, using isolated, direct instructional strategies. In addition, he or she employs controlled vocabulary stories in the begin-
“Numerous studies have shown that phonological awareness teaching programs that include letter-name and letter-sound correspondence have a greater positive impact on reading development than interventions involving phonological awareness or sound-letter instruction alone.”
vowel letter, which must be used in every word they create. The teacher urges them to observe how words change as different letters are added. They begin to see the importance of letters’ location in words. After they have created their words, students sort them according to patterns (words that start alike, have the same vowel sound or the same spelling patterns, etc.). Every activity starts with small words and ends with using all of the letters to make one big word.40

Implications for Teachers of Beginning Readers

Ellen White stated in the book True Education, “Teachers should see to it that their work tends to definite results. Before attempting to teach a subject, they should have a distinct plan in mind, and should know just what they want to accomplish. They should not rest satisfied with the presentation of any subject until their students understand . . . and are able to state clearly what they have learned.”41

This challenge to Adventist educators of her era still rings true today! The California Reading Program Advisory concluded their study, Teaching Reading, with these words: “We must provide a balanced and comprehensive reading . . . program in our schools so that every child will be ensured success as an effective reader . . . and thinker . . . We are in this process together, for the children.”42

As Christian educators, we have an even greater need to develop balanced and comprehensive reading programs in our schools. We must use the most effective instructional methods and materials available. Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction is one part of a total language-arts program.

Current research does not support either the implicit or embedded approaches to teaching phonics.

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According to information released in a pamphlet produced by the U.S. Department of Education, American children are not reading well enough—only 32 percent of the nation’s 4th-graders perform at or above the proficient level. The National Reading Panel has identified the five skills needed to ensure early reading success: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Because of the strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, every reading program should emphasize vocabulary. “Good vocabulary and good reading go hand in hand.”

Starting with a lump of clay, a sculptor goes through many steps to produce a finished product: manipulating the clay by smoothing, shaping, and pinching, adding additional clay as needed. Finally, the clay must be fired or glazed to complete the project. A painter begins with a blank canvas on which to project mental images. He or she selects a variety of tools and a palette of colors to produce a final product. Writers use a different medium—words—to produce their creative projects. However, like a sculpture or a painting, each writing product is flavored by the unique experiences of the creator.

The teacher can help ensure students’ reading success by providing a variety of experiences, including vocabulary development. But to do so, he or she needs to be able to use a variety of tools and activities. First, the teacher must understand the goals and objectives of vocabulary instruction. Second, he or she must know what kinds of vocabulary helps will equip students to communicate in a variety of contexts. Third, the teacher needs a palette of strategies from which to choose. Finally, he or she needs to create a developmental checklist to record each student’s vocabulary development.

**Goals and Objectives of Vocabulary Instruction**

According to Ruddell, there are three primary goals in vocabulary instruction. It must (1) “develop children’s background knowledge of concepts and word labels that enable them to comprehend narrative and expository text,” (2) “teach children how to understand new word meanings independently,” and (3) “build positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning and encourage independent word learning.” He lists the following objectives for developing new vocabulary:

- Apply active learning and comprehension strategies to expository and narrative reading material;
- Connect students’ prior knowledge to new vocabulary;
- Use the context of the story or exposition to check new vocabulary word meaning;
- Provide a variety of strategies that students can use indepen-
dently to determine the meaning of new words; and
• Motivate students to enjoy and value reading materials and to become independent readers.

The National Reading Panel recommends the following for vocabulary instruction:
• Teaching and learning of word meanings to achieve comprehension;
• Learning the meanings of words before reading a selection;
• Teaching of word meaning through a variety of direct methods (i.e., repetition, specialized computer programs, and exposure to a variety of contexts); and
• Learning words incidentally through reading and oral language experiences.

Kinds of Vocabulary
According to Farris, Fuhler, and Walther, there are four kinds of vocabulary:

Listening vocabulary: words a child hears and understands but may not use every day, which form the largest personal vocabulary. These words may be names of pets, family members, foods, or television characters.

Speaking vocabulary: words the child hears, understands, and uses in speech. These include words that are modeled by a parent and siblings.

Reading vocabulary: words the child recognizes such as his or her name or favorite cereal. This vocabulary grows to include all the words a child can read.

Writing vocabulary: words a child is exposed to from textbooks and other sources. This vocabulary is used in writing assignments and other written communication.
Every student has a personal vocabulary with four subsets: (1) listening—spoken words comprehended when heard, (2) speaking—words used in talking, (3) writing—words used in writing, and (4) reading—words recognized on sight. There is, of course, considerable overlap among the categories.

Techniques for Teaching Vocabulary

Children learn their first 6,000 words from their parents and peers, adding labels for people and objects. Based on observations of these early learning experiences, as well as the implications of research, Gunning points out that developing vocabulary is not simply a matter of listing 10 or 20 words and their definitions on Monday and giving a quiz at the end of the week. He offers the following principles for vocabulary development:

- **Build experiential background**—talk about experiences such as a trip to the zoo or a museum. Make the activity as concrete as possible.
- **Relate vocabulary to background**—connect new words to experiences students have had. You could introduce a word such as *compliment* by saying some nice things and then asking students to work in pairs complimenting each other.
- **Build relationships**—show how new words are related to each other by pointing out synonyms and antonyms, classifying words, and creating graphic organizers.
- **Develop depth of meaning**—help students understand words in different contexts. Definitions alone may be inadequate without a contextual setting.
- **Present several exposures**—make sure students repeatedly encounter the word. Using the word multiple times is crucial to understanding.
- **Create an interest in words**—choose motivating activities that inspire vocabulary development. For example, students can work toward gaining points for a Word Wizard Chart by recording instances of seeing, hearing, or using the words.
- **Teach students how to learn new words**—promote independent word-learning skills. Many strategies such as morphemic analysis, dictionary skills, etc., may be used.

The National Reading Panel examined more than 20,000 research citations to determine how vocabulary can best be taught and related to the reading comprehension process. Its findings were as follows:

- *Optimal learning results from the use of a combination of methods (both direct and indirect);*
- *Learning vocabulary can be incidental in the context of storybook reading or in listening to others;*
- *Students benefit from being exposed to words before reading a text;*
- *Substituting easy words for more difficult words can help low-achieving students;*
- *Vocabulary acquisition is enhanced when students learn in rich contexts, have repeated exposure to text, and use computers;*
- *Teaching methods must be appropriate to the age and ability of the reader, and actively engage the student.*

Other researchers also report significant gains in students’ comprehension when they are taught new vocabulary terms before reading a selection. Reinforcing what is taught over a period of time will also enhance comprehension. Sight words should be built from words students already comprehend. Other recommended activities:

- **Repeated Readings**: A student
rereads a text several times to improve his or her fluency and to decrease the number of errors.\textsuperscript{13}

- **Readers Theatre**: A student has “the opportunity to read a selection several times in preparation for a performance. The performance consists of students standing or sitting in a row at the front of the room and reading aloud from a script, usually adapted from a book. There are typically no props, scenery, or staging because emphasis is placed on oral interpretation of the text.” Free downloadable scripts for a range of grade levels can be found on the Website http://www.aaronshep.com/rt.\textsuperscript{14}

- **Choral Reading**: “[S]everal individuals simultaneously reading the same text aloud. The teacher first models fluent reading of the text, and then students read and reread it together until they are satisfied that they have read it in a fluent, natural, and pleasing manner.”\textsuperscript{15}

- **Word Walls**: Students and teachers choose words to display on large sheets of paper posted in the classroom. Students refer to the word wall during word-study activities and when they are writing.\textsuperscript{16}

- **Semantic Maps**: Students create a diagram or graphic organizer that shows how words are related in meaning to one another.\textsuperscript{17}

- **Read-Alouds**: When teachers read aloud, this provides a model for fluent reading, correct pronunciation of new words, introduction of words in a

Researchers . . . report significant gains in students’ comprehension when they are taught new vocabulary terms before reading a selection.

A variety of Internet resources are available. Listed below are some useful Websites:

- **http://www.manatee.k12.fl.us/sites/elementary/palmasola/rcompindex.htm**: Worksheets and games that focus on vocabulary builders, antonyms, synonyms, homophones, multiple-meaning words, compound words, contractions, word analogies, prefixes, suffixes, base words, syllabic rules.

- **http://people.bu.edu/jpettigr/Articles_and_Presentations/Vocabulary.htm**: Two Dozen Tips and Techniques for teaching vocabulary.

- **http://www.m-w.com**: An online dictionary that provides a daily word as well as many other resources.

- **http://www.vocabulary.com**: Levelled puzzles that utilize words based on a given definition and a common root word.
meaningful context, and clarification of word meanings.18

• Vocabulary Self-Selection Strategy: “[A] group activity in which each student, and the teacher as well, is responsible for bringing two words to the attention of the group . . . . Students place their words on the board. . . . Each pupil . . . talks about his or her word, where it was encountered, what it might mean, and why he or she thinks it is important for the class to know. . . . the class narrows the list to a predetermined number (five to eight words per week is typical). . . . Students then enter the words in their vocabulary logs and practice using the words in activities ranging from crosswords to research word histories to creating a class assessment. The cycle starts again the next week.”19

• Developing Vocabulary Knowledge Through Literature: Literature expands students’ vocabulary knowledge and provides them with experiences that cannot be re-created in the classroom.20

Diagnostic Checklist
Rubin21 has developed a helpful diagnostic checklist for vocabulary development that primary and intermediate teachers can use to record student progress. (See below and on page 37.)

Frances Bliss is a Professor of Education at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama.

### Diagnostic Checklist for Vocabulary Development (Primary Grades)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The child shows vocabulary consciousness by recognizing that some words have more than one meaning.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The child uses context clues to figure out word meanings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The child can state the opposite of words such as stop, tall, fat, long, happy, big.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The child can provide synonyms for words such as big, heavy, thin, mean, fast, hit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The child can give meanings for homographs (words that are spelled the same but have different meanings based on their use in a sentence). Examples: I did not state what state I live in. Do not roll the roll on the floor. Train your dog not to bark when he hears a train.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The child has developed a sense vocabulary to describe various sounds, smells, signs, tastes, and touches.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The child is expanding his or her vocabulary by combining words to form compounds such as grandfather, bedroom, cupcake, backyard, toothpick, buttercup, firefighter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The child is expanding his or her vocabulary by combining roots of words with prefixes and suffixes. Examples: return, friendly, unhappy, disagree, dirty, precook, unfriendly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The child is able to give the answer to a number of word riddles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The child is able to create a number of word riddles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The child is able to classify various objects such as fruits, animals, colors, pets, and so on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The child is able to give words that are associated with certain objects and ideas. Example: hospital—nurse, doctor, beds, sick persons, medicine, and so on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The child is able to complete some analogies, such as Happy is to sad as fat is to _________.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The child shows that he or she is developing vocabulary consciousness by using the dictionary to look up unknown words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REFERENCES
2. National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), pp. 13-15.
5. Pamela J. Farris, Carol J. Fuhlter, and Maria P. Walther, Teaching Reading: A Balanced Approach for Today’s Classrooms (New York: Me-
Diagnostic Checklist for Vocabulary Development (Intermediate Grades)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The student recognizes that many words have more than one meaning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The student uses context clues to figure out the meaning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The student can give synonyms for words such as similar, secluded, passive, brief, old, cryptic, anxious.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The student can give antonyms for words such as prior, most, less, best, optimist, rash, humble, content.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The student can identify different meanings for homographs (words that are spelled the same but have different meanings based on their use in a sentence). For example: It is against the law to litter the streets. The man was placed on the litter in the ambulance. My dog gave birth to a litter of puppies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The student is able to use word parts to figure out word meanings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The student is able to use word parts to build words.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The student is able to complete analogy statements or proportions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The student is able to give the connotative meaning of a number of words.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The student is able to work with word categories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The student is able to answer a number of word riddles.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The student is able to create a number of word riddles.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The student uses the dictionary to find word meanings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Ibid., p. 285.
17. Roe, Smith, and Burns, p. 152.
It Doesn’t Get Any Better Than This: Teacher Read-Alouds as a Powerful Instructional Tool

At a professional conference, James Bovel* and Connie Yashima* have the opportunity to discuss their classroom challenges with literacy expert Lucy Calkins. Although James teaches grades 3-8, and Connie teaches grades K-2, their concerns are similar.

Calkins listens as they try to frame their challenges in a positive way: “With such diversity in age and ability, how do we help students connect content with real life? What can be done to build a powerful repertoire of background knowledge? What methods can we use to ensure that our students invest more in the learning process?”

“How can we empower struggling readers and writers? What should we do about the number of students coming to our classrooms with limited English skills? How about those who can read but don’t?”

“And finally, so many of our students come to us with aching hearts and stressed-out lives. How do we fit in time to create classroom communities that help us bond as a class?”

As Calkins listens, her eyes begin to twinkle, and a smile lights up her face. “It’s as simple as changing one

“Consider putting teacher read-aloud at the heart of your instruction throughout the day.”

*Not their real names.

BY KRISTAL BISHOP AND KARI GRISWOLD
part of your program. Consider putting teacher read-aloud at the heart of your instruction throughout the day.\textsuperscript{3}

Calkins isn’t the only one offering this advice. Many experts agree, including Jim Trelease, Mem Fox, and Mary Lee Hahn. In fact, Laura Robb bases an entire literacy program for at-risk emergent readers on reading aloud.\textsuperscript{2} Like the authors of this article, you will find yourself mesmerized with the infinite array of teaching and learning possibilities afforded by reading aloud to students.

**Focusing on strategies good readers use will enable you to teach effectively as you read aloud.**

**Inoculate With Passion**

As teachers, we would be wise to follow children’s book author Gary Paulsen’s wise advice, “Read like a wolf eats.”\textsuperscript{4} Instead of spending all of your time pouring over teacher’s guides, creating activities that are used up in minutes, and grading endless papers—begin reading. The more you read, the more voracious your own reading appetite will become. You just won’t be able to get enough.

Permit yourself to be inoculated with the joy that such reading brings. But don’t stop there. Keep your students in mind. How will you use what you know to help them learn what
good readers do? Examine your own reading life so you will know reading from the inside out.

To keep read-aloud at the heart of your reading instruction, become more metacognitive as you read. Highlight vocabulary words. Make notes to help guide the listeners. Use sticky notes to mark where you use specific reading strategies such as activating prior knowledge, determining important ideas, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, synthesizing, and asking questions. Pause to wonder, clarify, question, and respond. Focusing on strategies good readers use will enable you to teach effectively as you read aloud. You will find yourself eager to intentionally model what you do as a reader as you converse about the shared experience of reading aloud.

Now, use your enthusiasm about reading to inoculate your students against aliteracy (being able to read but choosing not to do so). Acquaint them with your favorite authors and illustrators. Show them the books you are reading now and the ones you want to read in the future. Let them hear you agonize over which book to read next. Invite them and their parents to join a book club.

Just Let Them Talk

Lucy Calkins is convinced that the most powerful way to help students think about and make meaning from what they read. Vygotsky emphasizes thinking about and making meaning from what they read. The more complex the action [comprehension], the greater the importance played by speech. Sometimes speech becomes of such vital importance played by speech that needs to be taught and learned. In actuality, reading aloud provides many opportunities for instruction and strategy practice; it enhances both teaching and learning.

Rather than something to fill empty time, reading aloud should be the heart and soul of daily instruction. It should be an intentional teaching tool to help all students gain valuable reading strategies to use in their own lives. Use read-alouds to help students construct for themselves what good readers and writers do. Here is a small sampling of some strategies for reading aloud:

Read-aloud is a natural venue for modeling before, during, and after reading strategies. For example, a teacher may model the strategy of prediction by doing a picture walk through the book before reading a word of it. During the reading of the book, the teacher may model how readers monitor for understanding as they read. When the book is finished, the teacher can have students do a think-pair-share to discuss how their predictions matched what really happened in the story and how predicting helped them to understand the story better.

Reading aloud is also the most effective way to introduce students to the structures of text. Before you begin to read, help students to become acquainted with the book. Use the cover, dedication, and table of contents to introduce the book. Survey chapter titles and illustrations. Read the information on the back cover. Get to know the author and illustrator by reading author/illustrator notes. Use the book to show the different structures for fact and fiction books.

In addition to teaching reading strategies, read-aloud can also be a great way to teach writing strategies. It provides an exceptional opportunity for teachers to point out specific techniques, interesting vocabulary, and writers’ craft used by authors. Students can record these ideas in writers’ notebooks to use in their own writing.

Although reading aloud should be at the heart of reading instruction, it is
not the only step in the process of teaching literacy strategies. Instead, it is more like a lid that opens a treasure chest full of tools to be used by readers and writers. It is a time to introduce strategies and model them. Eventually, the teacher will turn over the responsibility to the students as they use the lessons learned in read-aloud during their own reading and writing. These strategies will enable students to experiment with and perfect their own literacy skills.

As teachers practice reading aloud, they refine their vision for instruction. Teachers can use what they discover to help them dig more deeply, using read-aloud to create a balance of pleasure, story, information, talk, teaching, and learning. As a result, students become better readers and writers while meeting required content standards and expectations in a rich, non-threatening, and enjoyable environment. It just doesn't get any better than this!

**The Long Farewell**

When students and teachers really get to know the text through interactive read-alouds, it feels right to linger with the book. Lingering increases the benefits obtained during the reading. Students are reluctant to bid farewell to ideas and characters with whom they have created relationships. Lingering activities include rereading favorite passages, looking for specific information, taking another look at the content, studying literary techniques, and using the text to construct understandings of literary craft and characteristics of genre. Discussions may focus on ways what was learned can be applied to one's reading life. Students will think of projects that extend the learning. Lingering is the perfect time to teach retelling and summarizing. And often reluctant readers will pick up the text and read it independently.

Creating a timeline of read-alouds, a Read Aloud Gallery, and birthday rereads are ways to return to favorite parts of books. You can also try book treasures. At the end of the read-aloud, each student is given a card containing a powerful quote from the book. On the card, they write the title of the book, rate it, and write an explanation for the rating. Then each student receives a simple treasure that represents something in the book (i.e., a feather for Blanca's Feather, kernels of rice for Nyla and the White Crocodile). Each student saves his or her treasures in a large, reclosable plastic bag. Throughout the year, they are given time to remove the book treasures and revisit the books. Their talk may center around text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connections.

**Ask fewer literal questions, and instead, emphasize open-ended literary questions.**

Reading aloud makes it difficult to pry a book out of the hearts and minds of students. It just doesn't get better than this—until you realize that there are even more benefits afforded by reading aloud.

**It Just Keeps Getting Better**

Consider the benefits of reading aloud to your students. When teachers read aloud, it creates infinite learning opportunities in literacy skills and strategies as well as in the content areas. It is one of the easiest and most effective ways to model what good readers do. Teachers can introduce favorite books and authors to students. Students can be nudged to extend their reading to a new author or genre. Reading aloud can also meet the needs of a diverse student population be-
Rather than something to fill empty time, reading aloud should be the heart and soul of daily instruction.

Your students have problems, use a read-aloud that addresses the problem.

As you notice areas of weakness in your students’ reading and writing, find something to read with them that will address those weaknesses. As you read like a writer, your students will begin to excel at writing. Take the time to model yourself what readers do. Read—every day, throughout the day. You’ll prove to yourself and your students that it just doesn’t get better than this. 

Rather than

PROVING IT

Beloved children’s author (and literacy expert) Mem Fox contends that if every caring adult read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to the children in their lives, we might wipe out illiteracy in one generation.12

During read-aloud, you can easily


4. Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman, Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader’s Workshop (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997).


10. Hahn, pp. 43, 44.


REFERENCES


4. Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman, Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader’s Workshop (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997).


10. Hahn, pp. 43, 44.


At the end of another week of teaching, Mary stands by her desk, looking at the pile of student writing she has promised to grade over the weekend. Sighing to herself, she wonders aloud, “Why am I creating so much work for myself? Every weekend, that seems to be all I do, grade student writing. I just don’t know if I can keep this up!”

During the early years of Adventist education, Ellen White, when giving counsel for teachers in the church’s fledgling church schools, considered writing instruction an essential ingredient of the language curriculum:

“One of the fundamental branches of learning is language study. In all our schools special care should be taken to teach the students to use the English language correctly in speaking, reading, and writing. Too much cannot be said in regard to the importance of thoroughness in these lines.”

She expanded upon this advice by expressing the following wish:

“It is my wish that the children study and write some each day. . . . If the children have a purpose and a will they can advance in knowledge daily. . . . If the children would practice in writing following closely the copy books and making use of the instruction they have had in writing they can by practice become good writers. But patience is required in this, as well as other things.”

These quotes are powerful statements supporting the inclusion of writing in every school’s curriculum. Notwithstanding, in more than a few Adventist classrooms I have visited in North America, students experience minimal direct writing instruction. When I ask teachers if they have ever considered using writing workshop, most say they have been.
introduced to it but don’t feel they have enough information to implement it. So I believe it is time to revisit writing workshop. That, then, is the purpose of this article, to review some essentials of writing workshop along with supplemental information to make it easier to use.

**Considering the Writing Reality**

It’s probably no accident that most adults seek employment in jobs that require little if any writing. Children, however, do not have that luxury. From 1st grade on, they are involved in some form of writing nearly every day. With the exception of reading and math, students are asked to do more with writing than with any other academic skill. And, as they progress through school, not only do the number and diversity of writing assignments increase, but also the sophistication of the writing skills required. Homework, class work, note taking, essay tests—all increase across the curriculum as students progress. Furthermore, with the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing, more and more students face tests that include questions requiring them to write short paragraphs and essays.

There is much more to writing than coming up with a good idea. Learning to write is similar to learning to speak, read, or play a musical instrument. All involve developmental skills and sequential processes. If writing is taught appropriately, new skills build on those acquired earlier.

Writing is hard work! Compared to other academic activities, it requires more fine motor control, attention, language, and memory. During early handwriting exercises, children must combine complex physical and cognitive processes to render letters precisely and fluidly. From this early formation of letters to writing an argumentative essay, “writing involves perhaps more subskills than any other academic task. To write well requires combining multiple physical and mental processes in one concerted effort to convey information and ideas. We must, for instance, be able to move a pen, or depress a key, precisely and fluidly to render letters, remember rules of grammar and syntax, place our thoughts in an order that makes sense, and think ahead to what we want to write next.” As writing tasks become more difficult and complex, students must invoke a wider range of skills—not just writing legibly, logically, and in an organized way, but also being able to recall and apply rules of grammar and syntax as well as appropriate vocabulary. Combining all these and other elements of language use makes writing the most complex and difficult of the language process.

The implications for elementary teachers seem obvious. Students need help to master appropriate motor skills and language development skills. For students who have not achieved mastery in previous grades, teachers must first address their instructional needs before they can help them reach their academic potential. Some students seem to take to language like ducks to water, while other students react like a cat facing a bath. However, the “skill of writing correctly will not come to them without an effort on their part . . . .”

**Creating a Positive Environment**

What can teachers do to help students become successful writers? I believe that providing structure for the writing process through the use of a writing workshop is the answer. For those who are unfamiliar with these terms, writing process refers to five stages of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing/publishing. While these five stages seem to suggest a linear progression, Nancy Atwell reminds us the writing process is actually recursive. In other words, students can be editing while they are drafting, and can share before they revise.

The writing workshop provides a framework in which the teacher can create and manage the structure in which the writing process takes place. According to Donald Graves, using writing workshop creates an optimum writing experience for students.

More than a few teachers have told me that writing workshop is not easy to implement. Upon investigation, I have found three major factors that make writing workshop difficult. First, many teachers have not been trained to use it and have not experienced it themselves. While they have read about it or heard it discussed in workshops or conferences, they lack the experiential element. Second, many have not seen other teachers use writing workshop effectively, so they are missing an effective best-practices model. Another fact that intimidates some teachers is that in a writing workshop, teachers and children assume different roles. Children take more ownership and control of their writing. Teachers spend less time with whole-group instruction and more time conferencing with students, working one-on-one or in small groups.

However, like any new skill, with practice, teachers become comfortable with and look forward to writing workshop time. Nancy Atwell and Lucy Calkins note that reports from teachers and parents indicate that writing workshop has a positive effect on students’ development as writers. Thus, establishing a writing workshop is well worth the effort.

**Creating a Positive Environment**

To create a positive environment for writing, teachers must involve their students in reading. Don Murray, a writing educator, states that “text can supply us with information that we can use in any form of writing. Or it can simply spark an idea.” Similarly, Jane Hansen states that students who are immersed in a text-rich environment (such as stories, magazines, newspapers, biographies, and poems) gain a much better understanding of sentence structure and writing conventions, as well as a sense of syntactical

With the exception of reading and math, students are asked to do more with writing than with any other academic skill.
competence. Texts provide models for students to examine. By reading widely, they discover graphic and linguistic features embedded in text, such as how authors start stories and create humor, how authors report about a subject or create engaging dialogue, etc. When students can explicitly explore, analyze, and study texts, they learn how authors construct books, what strategies they use, what questions they ask, and what decisions they must make about content, characterization, and tone.

Furthermore, students’ reading experiences act as a springboard for writing ideas, especially among younger writers. Jim Trelease points out that when students have many experiences with text, this enables them to internalize the structures and sounds of print. Reading specialists such as Dressel, Piazza, and Tompkins state that students who hear texts read aloud frequently become better writers and are able to use longer, more complex sentences. Likewise, Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi both note that for students experiencing literature for the first time, reading aloud to them helps “build the important foundation they need to grow as readers and writers.” In short, students who frequently read and listen to multiple genres of writing become better writers. Therefore, students need daily access to a wide variety of reading material.

**A Place for Writing**

Another important factor in writing success is the environment. Nancy Atwell posits that most professional writers have a particular place they prefer to be when they write. Here they have access to the tools they need for writing and feel at ease, mentally and physically. Student writers, too, need such a place. If at all possible, reserve certain areas of the classroom for writing. In these areas should be books, magazines, newspapers, and a bulletin board for posting writing work; computer(s) and printer, markers, stapler, thesaurus, stencils, dictionary, correction fluid, stationery, envelopes, private writing and conferencing spaces; and stack trays for student writing in various stages.

Be sure to set aside a regularly scheduled time for writing. This enables students to begin to mentally review the tasks they have completed and to plan future writing tasks.

Writing should be scheduled for no fewer than three days a week. When they engage in writing less frequently, students lose the momentum necessary for successful continuation of their writing projects. Long lapses mean lengthy review to restart and the loss of ideas that usually occur as students mentally rehearse their writing.

**Enabling Student Ownership and Success**

For a successful writing workshop, teachers need to help students assume ownership of their own writing. This occurs, in part, by making it possible for students to retrieve, store, and organize their writing projects. These materials are kept in file or storage boxes, ideally in hanging folders. Each student should have two folders, one for work in progress and one for completed work. When students are ready
Learning to write is similar to learning to speak, read, or play a musical instrument. All involve developmental skills and sequential processes.

Creating a Culture for Writing

How do teachers create a writing culture in their classrooms? First, they should compile a common set of terms related to writing and use them consistently. This means that early in the school year, when establishing writing workshop procedures, teachers need to introduce students to the jargon of writing. Terms like brainstorm, sloppy copy, draft, revise, edit, author’s chair, publish, conference, topic, response, audience, dialogue, insert, delete, etc., should be introduced and used consistently.

Having a common language about writing takes away some of its mystery and levels the playing field to ensure understanding. Not only will ALL students know what their teachers are talking about, but students will also have a vocabulary to use in communicating with their teachers, as well.

The teaching of writing usually follows the adage “do as I say.” This poses a problem. If students never see their teachers writing or hear them share personal experiences with writing, they may conclude that writing is not that important and has no personal value to their teacher. And if their teacher does not value it, how can they be expected to do so? Therefore, teachers have to model writing tasks. This does not mean writing about exotic, spectacular, earth-shattering events. How many people’s weeks are punctuated by extraordinary events? But everyone has stories about everyday life, about their passions, and about their past. Such events can be written about in journals, letters, diaries, poems, etc. The key is to let students see their teachers writing, refer occasionally to writing, and even read aloud something they have written. How can a person teach about something he or she knows nothing about? How can teachers help students solve writing problems they have not experienced and surmounted?

Facilitating Feedback

More than a few teachers have written papers in graduate school and wondered how well they did. Weeks or months later, when the papers were returned, the value of any feedback from the instructor was lost. The lack of prompt response is one reason why students fail to put forth as much effort as they could. Delayed feedback comes too late to do much good. One of the beauties of writing workshop is that students submit papers for teacher evaluation at various times, not all on one day as with traditional writing projects. This means that teachers do not have 40 essays to grade all at one time.

Writing workshop is designed so that teachers provide immediate feedback through frequent face-to-face conferences with students. The workshop approach fosters student confidence in the teacher’s comments and encourages the implementation of shared ideas. Since the face-to-face conferences occur while students are writing, teachers must learn to wait for student reaction and listen carefully before responding.

During the workshop, teachers must relate to the pupils first as writers and then as students. Therefore, the student writer becomes the focus. His or her response has a lot to do with the feedback received. Asking students who, what, where, when, why, and how questions helps them talk about their writing. This in turn helps the teacher to restate what he or she is hearing. If it is not what the student intended, the teacher uses the student’s words as re-focusing tools, encouraging the student to “write what you told me.”

Teachers must remember not to make student writing mistakes the focus of a conference. Meaning is everything. For example, meaning comes from knowing specifically what the student ate—i.e., macaroni, rather than food. If macaroni is misspelled, the editing cycle is the place to address that mistake. The central goal is for the students to convey meaning. If they focus on avoiding mistakes, they will be less likely to elaborate beyond the “bare facts” and more likely to write general, bland, “safe” accounts instead.

Peer Input and Group Sharing

Peer input is another forum for
feedback. One element of writing workshop I really appreciate is group sharing. This can occur in small focus groups or as a large group through the use of author’s chair, a process whereby a student reads part or all of his or her work to a large group. However, teachers must make certain to create an environment that allows such sharing to occur. Students can be brutal, so part of being a writing facilitator is to ensure that put-downs such as “that’s dumb” or “that’s stupid” do not occur. First, the teacher must discuss why people blurt out words like dumb or stupid. Usually, these statements indicate discomfort or a lack of understanding. The teacher’s role is to help students “unpack” such feelings. He or she can do this by establishing rules for response and addressing putdowns as they occur, discussing and modeling alternative ways to express feelings. Helping students learn more acceptable ways to respond often requires frequent modeling of alternative expressions. This means that teachers must keep their own biases in check when listening and responding to students.

Literacy teachers must keep several important considerations in mind: (1) They themselves need to engage in writing in some form—such as poems, journals, or narratives. (2) Writing workshop should be included in every elementary and secondary literacy educator curriculum, for when used as designed, its structure eliminates the weekend paper-grading crunch and enables more extensive student writing. (3) Frequent reading must be part of a literacy program. Reading enables writing. The more the two are linked, the greater competence students will have with language. (4) Finally, don’t despair if you try implementing a writing workshop and it doesn’t seem to work. Change is always fraught with uncertainty. Seek advice from books, articles, and other literacy educators who are making it work.

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9. Ibid.; and Donald H. Graves, A Fresh Look at Writing (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994).
10. Atwell; Callkins; and Jack Wilde, A Door Opens: Writing in Fifth Grade (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993).
16. Piazza; Tompkins.
18. Atwell.
19. Ibid. ; Callkins, Murray, Piazza; and Tompkins.
The dominance of prose and poetry in the curriculum of the Seventh-day Adventist high school leaves little time for the study of autobiography. The neglect is puzzling because reading and writing autobiographies can open the eyes and hearts of many students.

In the summer of 1988, sponsored by a grant from the Council for Basic Education, I traveled through Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri interviewing retired employees of the Chicago Great Western Railway for an oral history project. Everyone, I learned, had a story to tell. After spending six weeks on the project, I returned home with a wealth of experiences recorded on tape and the inspiration to create a reading/writing course, “The Art of Autobiography.”

Finding Material

My students read two autobiographies and write a series of four- to seven-page autobiographical anecdotes inspired by these accounts. High school students, unfortunately, tend to overlook their past as a source of insight about the present and the future and often moan that nothing worth writing about has ever happened to them. Most of what occurs in their lives may seem inconsequential: the first boyfriend or girlfriend, the birth of a sibling, a Pathfinder trip into the wilderness, or working with a parent to build a house or repair a motor. A well-chosen autobiography can inspire students to reflect on these experiences. Dennis Ledoux notes that students often discover meaning as they write their stories. However, the teacher must first carefully choose autobiographies for the...
students to read. A good choice will provide positive models for a variety of writing assignments. Not all personal accounts offer the inspiration beginning writers need for writing their own stories.

I chose autobiographies that would convince my students that they, too, could write personal stories about experiences similar to the ones they read. One was James Hearst’s *Time Like a Furrow*; the other was *Days of Rondo* by Evelyn Fairbanks. Hearst grew up in a rural environment on a farm near Cedar Falls, Iowa; Fairbanks grew up in an urban setting in St. Paul, Minnesota. Both writers selected incidents from their lives rather than relating an entire life history: Hearst’s volume may seem pedestrian, with its chapter titles such as: “Church,” “Relatives,” “Country School,” and “The Grove,” but the content resonates with the experiences of most students. Fairbanks’ chapter titles are similarly unassuming: “God,” “Orphans Are Made by Social Workers,” and “Being Black in Minnesota.”

As they read, students begin to see that if Hearst or Fairbanks can find meaning in such seemingly unimportant experiences, so can they. Every other fall semester since 1988, my students have created stories from the depths of their memories and their hearts—accounts that amuse and occasionally shock or sadden me and their classmates.

Two major factors influence the power and candor of students writing about their lives. First, a primary value of teaching nonfiction is the “directness and sense of honesty that comes with a single voice telling things as they are seen by that person.” Second, students begin to copy stylistic features from the documents they are reading.

In my course, I focus on six stylistic features present in the autobiographies we read in class and common to most narrative writing: The use of dialogue to replace some indirect discourse, the two-verb action pattern, the three-verb action pattern, the participial phrase placed where writers generally place it—at the end of the base sentence; the absolute construction; and the appositive. These six elements enliven a narrative and create a sense of movement.

**Sentence Structure for Narrative Writing**

Although they were published some 40 years ago, Francis Christensen’s insights about sentence structure offer a model for teaching students how to write absolutes and what Christensen calls verb clusters. The following examples taken from James Hearst, analyzed as Christensen advocated, illustrate two important types of sentences often found in narrative writing:

1. He put the saw in the box, the horse braced on the load of logs, and pitching the hay up to the end of a sixteen-foot rack.
   2. He could and did load twenty square, well-shaped load.

Christensen’s “verb clusters” are the traditional participial construction, but most of his examples—and Hearst’s as well—place the participle after the noun or pronoun they modify rather than before it. Professional writers apparently find the post-modifier position more natural to English usage, although many grammar textbooks insist that the participial construction should precede the word it modifies.

To make my point, I use examples from various narrative writers and require students to diagram them as illustrated in the examples cited above. After some practice with sentences written by published writers, students are ready to incorporate similar structures in their own narratives.

**Verb Action Patterns**

Another narrative structure also conveys the impression of movement. Two- and three-verb action patterns encourage students to select action verbs rather than stative verbs. In a chapter entitled “Dansk,” Hearst describes a contest of strength between his father and a young Danish farmer: “Father and Soren shifted and braced their feet.” The simple two-verb action pattern conveys an image of two men preparing for a struggle. A writer could use any number of verbs in a rapid-fire description of action, but the three-verb action pattern seems to offer a pleasing and resonant balance for a series of actions: “He [Hearst’s father] climbed up on the load of logs, took the lines, and spoke to the horses.” When students have practiced writing sentences using the two- or three-verb action pattern, they are less likely to rely heavily on the soporific to be verbs. Students also need to practice sentences with appositives and dialogue, a more familiar topic in writing classes.

The purpose of this brief discussion is to illustrate one way—though by no means the only one—to develop students’ awareness of structures that will enliven their narrative writing. Professional writers use absolutes, verb clusters, two- and three-verb action...
patterns, appositives, and dialogue regularly. Beginning writers do not, but finding such structures in narrative writing and emulating them when they write their own life stories offers students ideas for practical application from the reading-writing connection.

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1. The project was called “The Chicago Great Western and Its Communities: 1930-1955.”


3. Ledoux, pp. 116, 117.

4. James Hearst, Time Like a Furrow (Iowa City, Iowa: Iowa State Historical Department, 1981). The volume is currently out of print, but the Literary Estate of James Hearst has given me written permission to copy the book for classroom use; Evelyn Fairbanks, The Days of Rondo (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990). Fairbanks’ volume is still in print. I chose two Midwestern regional writers because their concerns relate well to the lives of my students, most of whom come from that part of the U.S. I recommend that teachers wanting to teach a course in autobiography turn to the local historical society for possible choices of works to be read in the classroom. The works are accessible and quite often reflect the interests and concerns of students who live in the region.


6. For a detailed discussion of what Christensen calls the rhetoric of the sentence, see
Successful communication in all four language modes—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—is essential for producing effective learning environments. Every teacher, regardless of grade level or content area, must daily endeavor to apply this fundamental truth in both theoretical and practical ways. Teachers know what happens when students, for any number of reasons, experience difficulty in efficiently navigating the various required “communication tasks,” especially when those tasks involve reading assignments that are part of the curriculum. Every teacher has encountered the intense and often overwhelming frustration that results from a breakdown between the student reader and the written text.

In every discipline, a student’s capacity to succeed academically depends in large part upon his or her ability to navigate various types of textual material. To do so, he or she must master the requisite skills. Depending on the course content, these skills may include the ability to make sense of graphs, charts, tables, and diagrams; identify a topic sentence in a paragraph; use a book’s table of contents and index; and scan a text for specific information. Academic texts often require the reader to decide which material is important, to discern fact from opinion, and to critically evaluate content. The reader must be aware of the visual and context cues and be able to respond accordingly.

While these skills may seem natural to teachers, they often present students, particularly those for whom reading is already a challenge, with significant barriers to comprehension. Therefore, teachers need basic strategies that allow them to identify and respond to the difficulties that keep students from establishing a meaningful connection with reading. This has a broader

“Lost in Translation”: Helping Students Create Meaning in the Content Areas

BY REBECCA WRIGHT
meaning than “literacy,” per se, at least when that term is defined solely as a student’s ability to read.

Beyond acquiring basic reading skills, students need to understand what they read, transitioning from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman explore this concept in their book Subjects Matter: Every Teacher’s Guide to Content-Area Reading. These authors, who are also professional educators, strongly believe that reading on any subject needs to both reflect and inform students’ daily experiences in the world around them. Among other things, they suggest that successful content-area reading incorporate the following concepts:

- Students use the textbook as a basic source, but also venture beyond it.
- Rather than relying upon a single authority, students consult a variety of sources and voices on a topic.
- Students sample a wide variety of genres including textbooks and other reference works, newspapers, magazines, Websites, and popular trade books.

- Reading selections have a range of lengths, from short newspaper and magazine articles to whole books.

- Many of the readings take an interdisciplinary approach, using the tools of multiple disciplines, combining science, statistics, history, biography, and more.

To ensure that all students use the best techniques, teachers must under-

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**Figure 1**

**K-W-L Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: ______ / ______</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date: ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name: ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class: ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter: ____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Think Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This is what I know</th>
<th>This is what I would like to learn</th>
<th>This is what I learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
stand how successful readers connect with text. Proficient readers internalize reading strategies and use them consistently in order to achieve comprehension, while struggling readers either lack these intrinsic strategies, or apply them only to texts with which they feel comfortable.³

To assist students, content-area instructors can divide reading assignments into three major comprehension stages: Before Reading, During Reading, and After Reading. By providing students with a range of tasks at each stage of the reading process, teachers can greatly increase students’ probability of comprehending the assignments.

Before Reading
Daniels and Zemelman⁴ see this stage as the most crucial. The teacher prepares the student to read by setting the agenda, stimulating students’ questions, beliefs, and predictions about issues they will encounter in the reading, and making connections with students’ prior knowledge. For example, using a pre-reading tool known as K-W-L⁵ allows students to document what they already know, what they want to know, and finally what they learned through study, class discussion, and experimentation (see Figure 1 on page 52).

Anticipation Guides can also serve as an effective pre-reading tool. These guides include a few short questions or statements about the assigned reading, using a yes/no or agree/disagree format. Anticipation guides encourage students to use their pre-existing ideas about the topic as a springboard into the actual assignment. Students in a science class, for example, might examine what they believe about theories of evolution. History students might make predictions about the roles of the U.S. and England in the events leading to the War of 1812, while students in a basic accounting class might examine their notions about what constitutes “good” credit, or maintain a set budget prior to actually having to do so.

It is useful to have students revisit their initial answers after an assignment has been completed so they can compare their “before” and “after” responses. Students in my American Classics class have performed this exercise with *The Scarlet Letter* in order to explore their attitudes about the nature of forgiveness, grace, and the role of the individual versus that of the community. While there will always be students whose answers remain virtually unchanged, it’s interesting to observe those who, after reading a text, find their experiences, perceptions, and worldviews enlarged (see Figure 2 on page 54).

During Reading
Once teachers have piqued students’ interest about the possibilities inherent in the assigned reading, they must find ways keep them involved. One of the easiest methods of doing this is a well-constructed Study Guide. While study guides are often considered “busywork,” they can, in fact, offer students a wealth of information and clues about what is important in the text. A well-written study guide gives students a model of intelligent inquiry, points them toward relevant, timely information, and serves as an excellent review for quizzes and tests. Creating good study guides requires some time and careful thought, but they will more than “pay for themselves” because of the number of times they can be reused.

One way to ensure the effectiveness of a study guide is to include a variety of questions covering a range of inquiry levels. Good study guides require students to make careful, critical assessments and to draw conclusions and defend them. Study guides can also serve as a springboard to classroom discussion.

Daniels and Zemelman⁶ suggest that students create Double Entry Journals during reading as an alternative to traditional note taking. Using this strategy, students record notes about their reading in two vertical columns on a sheet of paper. On one side, they summarize important textual information; on the other side, they jot down their thoughts, reactions, and questions about the things they have read. Double entry journals offer a valuable tool for teaching students how to identify key concepts in their reading. Another benefit is the immediacy of student response. Because students can refer back to their journal if they forget a key question or concept, this greatly enhances retention.

After Reading—Not Just the Test!
Regardless of the subject, teachers need to make reading tasks as manageable and relevant as possible. To do so, they can encourage students to integrate and reflect on newly acquired information, rather than simply testing them on it and moving on to the next topic.

Allowing students to share what they’ve discovered in the process of reading is one of the best ways to solidify that knowledge. It’s important for students to recognize that the end of a unit or chapter doesn’t signal the “end of learning” on that issue. By assigning students to compose a “wish list” of what they’d like to learn about a topic or issue and then encouraging them to follow up, teachers provide with a model for lifelong curiosity and lifelong learning.

Creating a sense of community is also extremely important: The more students hear their teacher talk about the concepts they are required to master, the more relevant this information becomes to them. Since each discipline has a shared “vocabulary,” it’s import-
Teachers need basic strategies that allow them to identify and respond to the difficulties that keep students from establishing a meaningful connection with reading.

It is crucial if teachers want their students to view themselves as members of the larger learning community.

Conclusion

While the ideas discussed in this article only scratch the surface of content-area reading strategies, they do suggest the range of possibilities that are available to teachers as they assist students with reading tasks. By guiding students through the reading process, teachers ensure that they connect with the text, and set the foundation for lifetime learning.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman, Subjects Matter: Every Teacher’s Guide to Content-Area Reading (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2004). The authors offer a wealth of content-area strategies, complete with visual models, as well as an insightful rationale on the subject of content-area reading.
5. Examples of K-W-Ls are available in most content-area texts. Thanks to Alvin Glassford, religion instructor at Andrews Academy in Berrien Springs, Michigan, for sharing his version of this strategy.
7. Daniels and Zemelman, pp. 118, 119.

Figure 2

Anticipation Guide

The Scarlet Letter Pre-Reading Questions (American Classics I)

Carefully read each of the statements below, and tell whether you agree (A) or disagree (D). There is no “right” or “wrong” answer, per se, as long as you consider the questions carefully and answer honestly. However, you must agree with the entire statement as it stands in order to write an “A” next to it. If you disagree with any portion of the statement, you must mark “D” indicating that you disagree with the entire statement. However, make a note of those statements with which you struggled due to “shades of gray.”

1. _____ “Not judging someone” means agreeing with or approving of everything the person does.
2. _____ It is OK to forgive someone for something, but you shouldn’t let the person forget that he or she messed up.
3. _____ When you do something wrong, it is important to feel guilty.
4. _____ It is OK to forgive someone for something as long as the person is visibly hard on himself or herself about it.
5. _____ Some mistakes simply cannot and should not be forgiven.
6. _____ Once rules or laws are established, they should never be deviated from; to do so weakens the law.
7. _____ It is ultimately most important to forgive yourself for a mistake, whether or not you obtain forgiveness from others.
8. _____ You should still feel guilty a long time after you make a mistake; this is the only clear proof that you’re sorry for what you’ve done.
9. _____ Nothing good can ever really come from the wrong we do.
10. _____ Feelings of guilt are what keep people from making the same mistake over again.
11. _____ To forgive a mistake is to excuse it.
12. _____ It is possible to disagree with someone’s views or behavior without passing judgment on him or her.
13. _____ Most people need someone else to help them see how weak they are; they’d never figure it out on their own.
14. _____ Guilt is an essentially positive thing.
15. _____ The needs of the group must ultimately take precedence over the rights of the individuals who comprise that group.
16. _____ Regardless of the restitution we may try to make for any mistake, we can never fully make up for the wrong we have done.
As I met him at the door to the classroom, he tried to avoid my eyes. "Tim, where’s your book? I thought you chose one at the library."

"Don’t make me find a book... just let me sit in class today, OK?"

"But that’s what we’re doing today... we’re reading. Do you want to get another book before class starts?"

"Mr. Jones... do I have to? I hate reading."

* * *

In a 6th-grade classroom across town, Jason slumps at his desk and mutters, "This is stupid!" as the teacher asks him and his friend Gregory, who sits across from him, if there’s a problem that requires them to talk out loud during reading class.

* * *

Down the hallway from Jason and Gregory, 2nd-grader Elijah dutifully—and slowly—sounds out each word on a page filled with words, losing all continuity and sense of story as the classroom aide points to each word with her finger.

Educators today know there is a problem with boys and reading. Many male students do not like to read. Many boys can read well but choose not to do so. And sadly, others cannot read at the appropriate grade level.
Of course, we all recognize that without appropriate skills and positive experiences with reading, the rest of a young man’s formal education will be a challenge—for him and for his teachers. Reading is at the heart of school. When students do not see themselves as readers, too often they struggle to learn and to find meaning in their education. According to the Read-Aloud Handbook, American boys are falling farther and farther behind girls in academics. The report states that more boys have learning disabilities, that more females are earning bachelor’s degrees, and that boys trail girls in both reading and writing. In addition, the article notes that more boys than girls are held back a grade.

We have all had students who slink through the day, avoiding the teacher’s eye or who disrupt the class with silliness, anger, and/or menace. Many of the boys in our classes meet with huge obstacles to becoming readers who will grow up to be productive, responsible, and happy men—fathers and uncles, grandfathers, and brothers, who value the written word and all the power it holds, and who model this behavior for others. William G. Brozo speaks of “the importance of literacy as boys develop a sense of self.”

By focusing on boys and reading in this article, I do not mean to suggest that girls have no challenges with reading or that all boys are challenged in this area. Improving students’ reading will not fix all society’s problems. However, we need to explore our obligations as teachers to young male readers. This article will suggest positive steps teachers can take to foster in their male students a greater engagement with reading.

**Why Don’t Boys Read?**

Jim Trelease, author of The Read-Aloud Handbook, explains that “reading is the single most important social factor in American life today.” Without a doubt, boys who fail to connect early with reading will encounter problems in school. Difficulty in school is a crucial, negative element in many males’ downward spiral of defeated and often deadly behavior. Statistics from the late 1990s cited in a recent article in the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy provide an unsettling picture of the hazards of being male today:

- Males commit 90 percent of all murders.
- High school boys are four times more likely than girls to be murdered.
- Boys are twice as likely as girls to be victims of violent crimes such as robbery and assault.
- Ninety-four percent of the nearly one million inmates in U.S. prisons are males.
- Nearly 125,000 youths, mostly males, are behind bars.
- Males are responsible for the vast majority of cases of domestic violence.
- The suicide rate for boys 10 to 14 years of age is twice that of girls, four times higher for ages 15 to 19, and six times higher for ages 20 to 24.

While I do not believe that reading is the great panacea for society’s ills or that fixing problems with boys’ reading will eradicate males’ deadly behavior, I do believe that fostering in boys a greater ability for and appreciation of reading will go a long way to curb much of society’s despair by allowing young men a greater chance at obtaining a good education. At least reading is an area about which we teachers have knowledge and influence; I think it is worth our time to pay attention to what is going on and do something about it.

**Solutions to Boys’ Problems With Reading**

In order to do something about the problems many boys have with reading, we need to first review what is known. Trelease reminds us that “students who read the most, read the best, achieve the most, and stay in school the longest.” Eve Bearne and Molly Warrington’s research confirms that “literacy cannot be separated from issues of self-esteem and preferred learning styles.” How can we get boys to read more and feel that it is worth their effort?

According to data recently released by the U.S. Department of Education and reported in USA Today, American boys are falling farther and farther behind girls in academics. Many of us would probably note significant differences between boys’ and girls’ reading in the area of content. Traditionally, much of children’s reading falls into “boys’ books” and “girls’ books.” While this probably represents an unfair generalization, certain subjects do appeal more to one gender than to the other.

Research into boys’ reading offers several telling points to consider when addressing boys’ reading issues. In “Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys”: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men, Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm summarize much of the recent research and cover many elements that contribute to boys’ disinclination to read. They found that:

- Boys do not comprehend narrative as well as girls;
- Boys are less interested in leisure reading than girls;
- Boys prefer reading newspapers and magazines, they lean more to escapism and humor;
- Boys do judge a book by its cover, and
- Boys tend to think of themselves as bad readers.

Many teachers are aware that many of their reluctant male readers can indeed read very well, but choose not to do so. It is important to distinguish between the illiterate male and the illiterate male. Many boys apparently do not find satisfaction in reading—especially as it is taught in school—and that dissatisfaction makes them progressively less likely to rely on reading to help them find meaning in their personal lives.

Many teachers are aware that many of their reluctant male readers can indeed read very well, but choose not to do so. It is important to distinguish between the illiterate male and the illiterate male. Many boys apparently do not find satisfaction in reading—especially as it is taught in school—and that dissatisfaction makes them progressively less likely to rely on reading to help them find meaning in their personal lives.
As teachers, we need to recognize these points as we plan and execute our classes.

Thomas Newkirk in Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture focuses on the need for readers to discover that satisfaction in reading is the key to success in school: “Unless we can persuade students that reading is a form of deep, sustained pleasure, they will not choose to read; and because they will not choose to read, they will not develop the skills to make them good readers.”

Teachers need to explore how boys develop into readers who find pleasure in their literacy. They need to identify boys’ reading interests and expectations.

Books for Boys?

This is especially true when teachers choose reading selections for the whole class: Will they appeal to boys? Because the majority of elementary teachers, school librarians, and children’s authors are women, choices of children’s reading material is mostly filtered through women. There is no doubt that whole-class reading assignments of Number the Stars by Lois Lowry, Sarah Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan, or Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson are great reading, but we must go out of our way to find books that appeal strongly to boys as well. Brozo advises: “Reading engagement should be the highest priority to teachers of disinterested and struggling readers, because only as boys encounter literature that speaks to their unique male imaginations are they likely to become regular and lifelong readers.”

Additionally, we ought to consider allowing students to select materials they want to read. If we expect boys to read deeply and for their own purposes, we must give them experience in choosing books to read. Our school and classroom libraries will thus need to include a broader selection—especially informational books, since many boys prefer this type of reading over stories and narratives.

Allowing boys to choose their own reading will also require us to rethink our policies about what kinds of reading material are suitable in the classroom and library. That is a challenge for many of us—especially in the Christian school. While I do not propose that Adventist schools lower their standards, I do think we need to recognize the pervasive influence and appeal of mass culture as we look for reading material that will engage boys. And, as any classroom teacher knows, boys are not generally “tasteful” in their interests. That fact will require us to explore what is acceptable for boys’ (and girls’) reading choices.

Thus, as teachers, we need to seek out the many excellent books that appeal to a boy’s sense of adventure, competition, humor, physical prowess, and inspiration. I would invite classroom teachers to get acquainted, or reacquainted, with titles such as Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli, A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck, and autobiographies intended for young readers.

Difficulty in school is a crucial, negative element in many males’ downward spiral of defeated and often deadly behavior.
Hatchet;” by Gary Paulsen, Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis—and a host of other worthy and notable books about strong, likeable, and responsible male characters.

Schedule Time for Reading

We need to schedule time in class for personal reading. Many teachers have made reading workshop an integral component of their language-arts curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels. Allowing students to read for their own purposes ensures that there is a regular time for reading each day. Teachers who have implemented this approach tell me that their students, both boys and girls, look forward to settling in with “a good read.” This needs to happen at school because reading at home does not occur in a large number of households.

Books about males by males are possible choices. Newspapers and magazines should be available as well; encyclopedias, almanacs, and atlases appeal to the male readers who prefer informational texts over stories. If a book, newspaper, or magazine grabs a boy’s attention, use it to redirect his attention and energies. It just may spark a lifelong commitment to reading.

Along with providing time for reading in school, we need to allow time for students to talk about what they have read. Bruce Pitre in Teenage Boys and High School English explains that “it is crucial that there be sharing time . . . some way for kids (and teacher) to hear what other people are enjoying reading.” Kids need to know how adults who value reading behave—they choose books that interest them and then talk about them to other people.

Our goal must be to get boys to make a lifelong commitment to reading. This is best achieved when boys see this modeled by other males. Whether it’s a teacher, a principal, a pastor—or more significantly—a father, grandfather, uncle, or brother, a man who reads provides boys with a powerful image of what it means to be male. A brother who reads the newspaper, a father who has a stack of books

How can we get boys to read more and feel that it is worth their effort?

by the side of his bed, a grandfather who takes his grandsons to the library—these men provide boys with a positive and more complete image of masculinity. As teachers, we need to look for ways to incorporate reading men into our classrooms.

I was honored when one of my student teachers recently asked me to guest read for her 2nd- and 3rd-graders’ “bedtime” story in the school library early one evening. The students and their families met together in their slippers and pajamas, some clutching their teddy bears, and I read Mo Willems’ Don’t Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus.

Many of the children did not have fathers or grandfathers at home to read to them, so I like to think that some of the little boys there that evening caught a glimpse of how wonderful it would be to be someone who enjoys reading, laughs at stories, and wonders what story will next catch his imagination.

Conclusion

We need to read to boys, and to encourage men to read to boys. And we need to read boys. By that, I mean we must take another look at how the boys in our classrooms negotiate reading. We need to observe our boys who are engaged readers and then look for ways to duplicate their positive reading traits, expectations, and behaviors in the rest of our students. Reading boys offers great rewards—as we help these young men develop into caring, responsible men whose literacy is a blessing to all.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. William G. Brozo, To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Fem and Pretteen Boys in Active Literacy (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2002), p. 2.
5. Trelease, p. 7.
11. Katherine Paterson, Jacob Have I Loved (New York: Scholastic, 1980).
12. Brozo, To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader, p. 4.
13. Smith and Wilhelm, p. 11.
14. For example, Dav Pilkey’s series, The Adventures of Captain Underpants (New York: Scholastic, 1997) are funny to kids; they speak to boys’ imaginations, but the books may not fit into the “tasteful” model many teachers have for their students’ reading experiences at school.
Halfway through the school year, my phone rings. It is a distraught mother seeking help for her 7-year-old son, Stanley,* who is at risk of failing 2nd-grade reading. Stanley lacks the skills and experiences that a normal student should have developed by this time. Stanley is Reading Disabled.

Maria* is a Spanish-speaking student in my grade 1 class. A recent immigrant, she has no English phonetic skills or awareness, and no parental or sibling role models to help her read in English. Her parents are eager for her to learn English. I speak no Spanish. Maria is Reading Disadvantaged.

Teachers in the Seventh-day Adventist school system must address the needs of students from varied backgrounds and diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socio-economic groups. In addition, a growing number of students have visual, speech, and hearing impairments, developmental delays, learning disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disturbances. Some are gifted and need an enriched curriculum. This is the scene in almost every 21st-century classroom.

Ensuring that all of these students read well deeply concerns many teachers, for academic success depends greatly on reading ability. Due to the size of Adventist schools, they usually have limited resources to address the needs of students such as Stanley and Maria. Many teachers know what reading materials and strategies work with most students, but lack the background to address the specific needs of struggling or disabled readers, those identified as reading disadvantaged, and those for whom English is a second language (ESL) or who have limited English proficiency (LEP). Therefore, this article will examine reading expectations for students, particularly in kindergarten through grade 3, as well as strategies that regular classroom teachers can use to identify and assist struggling readers.

Learning to Read

Children learn to read, mastering the skills and strategies necessary to be successful readers, by 3rd grade; they read to learn, using their reading skills and strategies to further expand their knowledge and understanding in the content areas, after 3rd grade. Grade 3, then, serves as the transition from “tool learning” to “tool using” for students. Despite the change in the reader’s focus during this time period, these are related and complementary processes.

Two recent U.S. presidents have made it a priority to promote literacy among early elementary-grade children. President Bill Clinton, in his America’s Reading Challenge, stated: “Forty percent of all children are now reading below basic levels on national reading assessments. Children who cannot read early and well are hampered at the very start of their lives. This will be truer as we move into the twenty-first century . . . .” President George W. Bush, in his No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, recognized that this problem had not yet been solved. Reutzel and Cooter suggest that this act was “intended to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers . . . .” These initiatives were prompted, in part, by concerns about the number of students failing literacy-related assessments.

In addition, research done by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) suggests that “Children who fall behind at an early age (kindergarten and grade 1) fall further and further behind over

*Not their real names.
time. Longitudinal studies show that of the children who are diagnosed as reading disabled in third grade, 74% remain disabled in ninth grade.74 Furthermore, Grossen’s research asserts that children need “developmentally appropriate” activities, “using appropriate instructional strategies at an early age—especially in kindergarten.”75 Due to the significance of reading instruction for children in the early grades, K-3 teachers need to be familiar with recommended practices for struggling readers.

**Identification of Reading Problems**

Students who struggle to read at grade level often have difficulty decoding words, utilizing cues from sentence structure, and making sense of text. According to NICHD research: “The best predictor in K or 1st grade of a future reading difficulty in grade 3 is performance on a combination of measures of phonemic awareness, rapid naming of letters, numbers, and objects, and print awareness.” In comparing “dependent” readers with their more skilled “independent” peers, Kylene Beers says that independent readers “figure out what’s confusing them, set goals for getting through the reading, use many strategies for getting through the text, know how to make the mostly invisible process of comprehension visible.” By contrast, dependent readers “stop, appeal to the teachers, read on through, keep the mostly invisible process of comprehension at the invisible level.”

G. Reid Lyon provides further insight about children who have difficulties in reading:

“In general, children who are most at-risk for reading failure are those who enter school with limited exposure to language and who have little prior understanding of concepts related to phonemic sensitivity, letter knowledge, print awareness, the purposes of reading, and general verbal skills, including vocabulary. Children raised in poverty, youngsters with limited proficiency in English with speech and hearing impairments, and children from homes where the parent’s reading levels are low are relatively predisposed to reading failure. Likewise, youngsters with subaverage intellectual capabilities have difficulties learning to read, particularly in the reading comprehension domain.” Among this group are students classified as ESL/LEP who struggle to read because English is not their first language. They often lack the experiences that foster English language learning and vocabulary development. Vacca and Vacca point out that “cultural variation in the use of language has a strong influence on literacy learning” but add that “language differences should not be mistaken for language deficits among culturally diverse students.”76 Leters warns that “it is important to note the age and literacy background of the second-language learner; one observation does not fit all.”77

“Nevertheless, the research we have shows that English reading and writing development processes are essentially similar for both English learners and native English speakers . . . . That is, in reading, all learners gradually come to use their developing English language knowledge, of print conventions to put their ideas on pages.”78 Students’ reading difficulties can be identified in a variety of ways. Reading assessments include phonemic awareness and fluency tests, informal reading inventories, anecdotal records, interest surveys, fluency, running records, portfolios, and standardized diagnostic reading tests. An informal reading inventory (IRI), consisting “of a series of graded passages that students read and answer questions about,” is a good place to begin the assessment process.79 Additional assessments may be administered, depending on the results of the IRI.

**Instructional Strategies for Struggling Readers**

Reading instruction for students in kindergarten through grade 3 usually focuses on the “Big Five” areas: (1) Phonemic Awareness and Alphabetic Knowledge, (2) Phonics and Word Attack Skills, (3) Vocabulary, (4) Comprehension, and (5) Fluency.80 “Phonemic awareness refers to the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual speech sounds.”81 Whereas “phonological awareness includes identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, onsets and rimes . . . . rhyming and alliteration.”82 Lindamood-Bell identify children’s difficulty in identifying sounds within words as the primary cause of decoding and spelling problems. “Weakness in phonological processing causes individuals to omit, substitute, and reverse sounds and letters within words. This is also a cause of difficulty in learning a second language. Individuals with weak phonological processing cannot get the words off the page: they cannot judge whether what they say matches what they see.”83

Phonics instruction emphasizes systematic and predictable relationships between spelling and speech sounds. Roe, Smith, and Burns assert that, “For phonics instruction to be effective, students need to be ready to learn phonics, and teachers need to provide context and reinforcement—a reason to learn phonics.”84 These authors advocate the use of two types of phonics applications: Synthetic and Analytic. In synthetic phonics, the student is taught “speech sounds associated with individual letters,”85 while in analytic phonics, sight words are taught first, followed by the sounds within the words. Bright Solutions for Dyslexia suggests putting individual

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**Children learn to read, mastering the skills and strategies necessary to be successful readers, by 3rd grade; they read to learn, using their reading skills and strategies to further expand their knowledge and understanding in the content areas, after 3rd grade.**
letters and sounds together (synthetic), and breaking them into smaller pieces (analytic). Analogic phonics, where sounds are taught within the context of word families, is another option. Whichever approach is adopted, Marilyn Jager-Adams states:

“Deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns, and words, and of the phonological translations of all three, are of inescapable importance to both skillful reading and its acquisition. By extension, instruction designed to develop children’s sensitivity to spellings and their relations to pronunciations should be of paramount importance in the development of reading skills. This is, of course, precisely what is intended of good phonics instruction.”

Smith, Walker, and Yellin point out that, “Many beginning readers struggle with decoding a text. Lack of appropriate instruction; reading text at the frustration level; difficulty with phonological awareness, including the inability to segment phonemes (i.e., unable to divide a word into its individual sounds); and ineffective phonemic synthesis (i.e., unable to connect the sounds to form words) are a few ways that some readers get off to a rough start.” The National Reading Panel also cites “solid evidence that phonics instruction produces significant benefits for children from kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulties learning to read. The greatest improvements in reading were seen from systematic phonics instruction.”

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction for struggling readers should always be taught in the context of authentic text. We need to hook struggling readers to books that they not only are able to read, but also want to do so. Shanker and Ekwall outline principles for teaching students with reading difficulties. Their recommendations emphasize both the part (i.e., letter, word level) as well as the whole (i.e., sentence, text level) in the reading process:

Most students require a certain amount of systematic, sequential skill instruction to learn how to decode or pronounce unknown words. The amount of instruction required varies from student to student. Nearly all remedial readers require direct instruction, in which the teacher clearly presents information in small increments, while guiding and monitoring the pace of student learning. All students should be taught at, and should practice reading at the level of difficulty which ensures that they experience frequent success. All too often, disabled readers are assigned material that is much too difficult for them. From this experience, they learn only frustration, instead of how to read successfully.

All students need substantial amounts of reading practice to ensure that they learn and use important skills as well as to help them appreciate the value and joy of reading. Far too many struggling readers spend too little time actually engaged in the act of reading.

In addition, students should learn strategies that promote vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency so they can read independently:

“Good readers ask questions before, during, and after they read . . . go back and reread for understanding . . . use what they know to make predictions . . . know when they make a mistake and go back to fix it . . . use many different ways to work out a word that they don’t recognize . . . read fluently and with expression . . . use their background and experiences to help them understand the book . . . make connections to other books they have read . . . understand what they have read and can talk about those understandings . . . READ, READ, READ”

Additional suggestions for ESL/LEP learners include the use of methods “that bridge cultural knowledge and whatever texts are being read . . . contextualize instruction . . . within the composing and comprehending process . . . [and] use authentic materials from the learner’s community.” The new Seventh-day Adventist reading program for North American Division schools uses a thematic approach with much focused reading across the curriculum, which incorporates language-oriented skills and activities.

Conclusion

As we accept the challenge of teaching students with diverse backgrounds and abilities, we are reminded of Ellen White’s statement: “True education is not the forcing of instruction on an unready and un receptive mind. The mental powers must be awakened, the interest aroused.” After identifying the needs of each student, teachers can choose from a variety of instructional strategies that address the specific areas where students are experiencing difficulty. “Exemplary classroom programs cannot always ensure that all children will become proficient readers . . . but they can dramatically reduce the number of children who are currently classified as reading disabled or remedial readers.”
15. Ibid, p. 36.
20. Patricia M. Cunningham and Dorothy P. Halen, Making Words: Multisyllabic, Hands-On, Developmentally Appropriate Spelling and Phonics Activities (Torrance, Calif.: Good Apple, 1994).
27. Gipe, p. 60.
29. June L. D. Fiorito, A Comparison of the Effect of Teachers’ Theoretical Orientations on Students’ Attitudes and Achievement in Reading Among Students in Grade Three and Four (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, La Sierra University, Riverside, Calif., 1997), pp. 56-59.

Building Literacy Through Home/School Partnerships

“The teachers in the home and the teachers in the school should have a sympathetic understanding of one another’s work. They should labor together harmoniously, imbued with the same . . . spirit, striving together to benefit the children physically, mentally, and spiritually.” —Ellen G. White.

Home/school collaboration is a concept that the Education Department of Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska) is eager for its students to experience and embrace. As part of their coursework, senior elementary education students enrolled in Reading Assessment class participate in Reading Buddies, an after-school program for 1st through 6th graders from Helen Hyatt and George Stone elementary schools. Modeled after a program instituted by Donald Bear at the University of Nevada’s Center for Learning and Literacy, Reading Buddies gives seniors a chance to assess the elementary students’ reading vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency and make plans to address their literacy needs.

Following the assessment, the seniors use the remaining sessions to read with and to their young buddies, conduct word study, and help them with writing. Besides conferring with the children’s classroom teacher, Union students send home parent questionnaires, asking what types of interests and activities the children enjoy, as well as how much time parents spend reading themselves and with their children. One student stated that her buddy’s enthusiasm about reading rose significantly when she sought out books about space, one of his interests. She might not have known this without the help of the parent survey.

Another way pre-service teachers and students from other disciplines across Union’s campus interact with young students in the greater Lincoln community is through First Book, a nationwide organization that since 1992 has distributed more than 20 million books to disadvantaged children. The parent organization collaborates with the college’s local advisory board, First Book-Union College, to get books into the hands and homes of children.

So far, Union College students have donated, raised funds, and received grant monies to place more than 5,000 books into the hands and homes of children. Two examples of the home/school possibilities of such an initiative are the Hispanic Community Center and the Lincoln YMCA’s morning program at a local elementary school and community center, respectively. The Hispanic Community Center (HCC) operated the Adelante (meaning to advance or progress) after-school program, which Latino youth attended with their parents. Books purchased with funds from First Book-Union College were read in an after-
school setting. The center’s director helped the Hispanic parents learn to
create a list of discussion questions that would engage their youngsters at
home.4

At Elliott School, 100 students start each morning with breakfast, then
break into reading groups where they and the YMCA staff read from books
provided by First Book-Union College. After the groups finish reading each
book, the children get to keep their copies.

“The partnership with First Book-Union College enables the kids to be-
gin building their home library at a very young age and take pride in their
literacy,” says Benjamin Zink, executive director of the Community Services
Branch YMCA.5

Union’s teacher candidates also dis-
tribute information to parents at the
college’s partner schools relating to
reading with their children, as well as
lists of books for children. Each of
these efforts exemplifies a successful
joint venture and strategic alliance,
with increased literacy as the goal.

Would you like to increase collabo-
ration between your school and com-
3

community? It’s not difficult to begin. Try
some of these ideas:
    • Newsletters: Send a weekly
      print or e-mail newsletter to parents.
    • Book Club: Set up a program
      like the one at George Stone School,
      where every student is asked to read
      one non-fiction juvenile book and one
      juvenile periodical monthly. In addi-
tion, one book, on a chosen theme, is
      selected for school-wide reading “This
month’s theme is the history of Mex-
ico,” stated Susan Zimmermann, head
teacher, “so we are asking parents to
help students check out library books
around that theme.”

    • Classroom or School Scrap-
books: Take photos throughout the
year and compile a selection of photos
of students, together with captions
written by the students. Send the book
home to various families each night,
asking the family to fill out a comment
sheet.
    • Book in a Backpack: Place
books and literacy activities in a color-
fully decorated backpack and have it
circulate to the students’ homes.

    • Local or National Initiatives:
Schools can get involved in First Book,
Pizza Hut Book-It, or other types of
programs. Local and state reading
councils make ideas and materials
available to teachers through member-
ship in local chapters of the Interna-
tional Reading Association.

Other ideas include using parents as
readers, storytellers, tutors, or vol-
teers who access books. In her in-
spiring book, Conversations, author
Regie Routman shares a letter from a
teacher inviting parents to participate
in a Read-In. The letter states that the
class will adapt its activities to meet
the parents’ time and work schedules.
Parents can read one of their favorite
books, or the teacher will have one
ready for them to read. A sign-up sheet
accompanies with the letter.6

The possibilities are endless, as are
the benefits, when schools initiate joint
ventures and strategic alliances. With
so much to be gained, it is important
that educators work to strengthen
school ties with parents. They will thus
both provide and receive support in
developing children’s literacy.7

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in the Division of Human De-
velopment at Union College in
Lincoln, Nebraska.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
1. Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teach-
ers, and Students (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific
2. Helen Hyatt Elementary is an Adventist
school in the Lincoln, Nebraska, community;
George P. Stone Elementary is Union College’s
laboratory school.
3. In this article, the word parent will in-
clude grandparents, guardians, or other author-
ized caretakers of students.
4. The Adelante program operated under the
leadership of Holly Burns, formerly the director
of the Hispanic Community Center in Lincoln,
Nebraska. The current program director for the
center is Nate Woods, who continues to collabor-
ate with First Book-Union College.
5. Quote from Benjamin Zink, director of
YMCA, in press release, Lincoln, Nebraska, April
22, 2005.
6. Regie Routman, Conversations: Strategies
for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating (Ports-
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