

# Meeting At-Risk Students' Needs: READING WORKSHOP

BY MARCY MUNSTERTEIGER

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**R**ecently I have modified my sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade reading classes to meet the needs of my multicultural students. As a result, we have experienced many successes in reading.

Elizabeth<sup>1</sup> was not progressing in reading, and had become very discouraged. English is her second language, and she fussed and complained when asked to come to reading class. She felt frustrated because, even though she was in the seventh grade, fifth-grade material was too difficult for her.

Several weeks later, after Elizabeth had had some individualized help, I noticed three books on her desk. I asked her what she was doing. She replied, "I can't choose which one to read so I read 15 minutes from each book."

This child's success resulted from modifications I have made to meet my students' needs. Early in the school year I assess the reading ability of each student. I schedule periods of silent sustained reading (SSR) during which I ask students to read to me, one at a time, from a book they have chosen. I note the title of the book and identify the reading level, listen for fluency, and ask comprehension questions on the material they have read. This gives me an idea which students are reading below grade level. I then set in motion a program to help at-risk students.

Elizabeth was one of these students, so I began tutoring her every day for a half hour. During this time I had her read aloud while I listened and offered assistance. I observed and listened for areas where she needed help, and then

taught to that need. The individual attention gave her the boost she needed.

Most of the personal time with at-risk students is spent in reading. I keep them in a tutoring program for 10 to 20 weeks, or until they can read a book in-

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dependently with at least 80 percent comprehension. My program is based on Reading Recovery, a plan developed in New Zealand to help at-risk students.<sup>2</sup>

### **Reading Recovery Techniques**

Reading Recovery assumes that children learn to read by reading.<sup>3</sup> Reading Recovery teachers choose from hundreds of books that have been rated for difficulty. The teacher analyzes each student and adapts the program to fit the child's needs. The teacher then starts the student doing reading and writing activities.

The success of any reading program depends upon the availability of books in the classroom. Our extensive library supplies 80 students with reading materials. They can choose and return books at any time during a school day.

Before I use materials I review them to be sure they are appropriate for Christian young people. I do not use nor recommend all the books on the reading lists for our students.

Reading Recovery gives teachers special training in working with "at-risk" students. The teacher attends two-and-one-half-hour training sessions each week throughout the school year. The child leaves the regular class and works one-to-one with a teacher. As a result the child and teacher learn

and benefit at the same time.<sup>4</sup>

### **Accelerated Reading Program**

The special attention these at-risk students receive enables them to blend in easily with the next segment of my reading program, which involves all students. The Accelerated Reader is a computerized reading management program.<sup>5</sup> The AR uses literature and a computer tutorial program that maintains a record of books read and comprehension percentages for each student. Research by Judith Paul and Terrance D. Paul shows that the AR uses proven learning strategies to achieve the higher

thinking levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.<sup>6</sup> The AR's individualized, noncompetitive enrichment program frees the teacher from endless paperwork.

This program includes a book list of classics, award-winning contemporary books, and bridges to adult learning books from which students may choose. Points are given to each book according to the number of words in the book.

The student reads a book and then answers a 5- to 20-question multiple choice computer test. Teachers can also write their own tests using Adventist reading materials. They can then add these to the computer testing program. The computer prints out management records for the teacher as well as information for parents. If the student receives 100 percent on the test, the teacher can be certain that the student had achieved high levels of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The points earned go down according to the number of errors.

To evaluate students on the Accelerated Reading Program, the Slosson Oral Reading Test was given to 32 second graders at Meadows Elementary School in Colleen, Texas. Students who had

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earned 20 points or more had increased their reading level by an average of more than 15 months.<sup>7</sup>

An additional plus to the AR is that children choose their own books and read at their independent reading level. I initially thought this might be a problem for my junior high students who read at lower levels. This has proved not to be the case. Even during our "book talks" these students feel comfortable sharing the books they had read. Across our campus you see students of all ages carrying around various levels of reading material. It's accepted without question.

Emery, as an eighth grader last year,

could not pass a test in the computerized reading program. After he failed three times, we talked about some strategies he could use to increase his comprehension. First, we chose a book at his reading level. After he had read the book, we discussed it and then he took the test. He passed the first test with 70 percent. He was ecstatic! Emery continued to increase his reading level as he passed each test. He finished his eighth-grade year by successfully reading and passing a test on the book *Kidnapped*.<sup>8</sup>

Emery is now in the ninth grade. He still relies on me to find materials for him to read. He is no longer in the AR program, but I have saved his computer disc so he can use it to take tests. This has increased his confidence in his reading ability as well as his self-esteem.

I also require my students to read a full-length book each quarter. This requires advance planning and budgeting. The first quarter of this year we read *The Hiding Place*.<sup>9</sup> Each student follows along in his or her copy as I read. This allows even at-risk students to feel a sense of accomplishment in being able to finish each book. And because everyone has read the same book, group dis-

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cussions are very meaningful.

### Response Journals

Equally important to their reading skills is the response journal each of my students must maintain. Response journals are written dialogues between two people.<sup>10</sup> As my students read, they respond to their reading through their journals. I in turn respond back to them. Julie Wollman-Bonilla states:

*Response journals are well suited to the active nature of the reading process. They invite students to construct personal meaning by building on what they know, reflecting upon the print, formulating hypotheses, and asking questions. Response journals are also conducive to engagement because they encourage students to define their own purposes for reading and to interpret texts personally.*

*In addition, response journals help students develop mastery of their reading processes. By encouraging them to reflect on how they read, both as they write their responses and as they read their teacher's replies, journals help to develop awareness and control of useful reading strategies.<sup>11</sup>*

Through response journals, my students not only acquire better reading skills but also make personal application of what they have read.

Some suggestions for responses are:

- What you liked or disliked and why
- What you wish had happened
- What you wish the author had included
- Your opinion of the characters
- Your opinion of the illustrations, tables, and figures
- What the text reminds you of
- What you felt as you read
- What you noticed about how you read

- Questions you had after reading<sup>12</sup>

Through my responses to the students I encourage them to ask questions and to express their feelings about the things they have read. I record the number of entries they make each week, but I do not mark them up with red pencil or grade them. If the students respond three times a week they receive an "A" for their journal.

### Teachers Need to Read, Too

Finally, besides providing materials for students to read, classroom teachers must keep up on their reading. The stu-

dents will ask whether you like a book, and they will rely on your judgment in picking out reading materials.

These are some of the ways I try to meet the needs of students with varying reading skills. This program works well with the Adventist reading series and enables many at-risk readers, for the first time, to experience enjoyment and success in reading. ✍

I am developing tests on Adventist reading materials that can be shared with teachers in the Adventist school system. These tests will be available from San Diego Academy. I would like to share ideas and materials with other Teachers interested in a computerized testing program for the Life Reading Series. For more information, write to Martha Munsterteiger, San Diego Academy, 2700 East Fourth St., National City, CA 91950 U.S.A.

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Names have been changed to protect students' privacy.

2. For information about Reading Recovery, contact Carol Lyons, Ohio State University, telephone (614) 292-7807.

3. Gay Su Pinnell, "Success for Low Achievers Through Reading Recovery," *Educational Leadership* 48:1 (September 1990), pp. 17-21.

4. Ibid.

5. The Accelerated Reader was developed by Advantage Learning Systems, Inc., P. O. Box 36, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54493-0036. Telephone: toll-free (800) 338-4204 or (714) 424-3636.

6. Judith Paul and Terrance D. Paul, "Theoretical Foundations," Advantage Learning Systems, Inc., "The Joy of Reading." Videotape, Port Edwards, Wisconsin.

7. "The Joy of Reading," Video.

8. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 1963).

9. Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

10. Julie Wollman-Bonilla, *Response Journals* (New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 1991), p. 7.

11. Ibid., p. 11.

12. Ibid., p. 22.