

Volume 1, Number 2

PROVEN PRACTICE

**PREVENTION &
REMEDICATION
SOLUTIONS
FOR SCHOOLS**

*A Journal for Educators
Translating Research to Practice*

Accelerating the Growth Curve: Improving Opportunities for Children at Risk for Reading Failure

Joseph E. Lockavitch
Concord, North Carolina

Lillian Morgan
Salisbury, North Carolina

Bob Algozzine
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Abstract: Reading problems are among teachers' most prevalent academic concerns. In the current study, students at risk for serious reading failure were taught word recognition and comprehension skills using a commercially available program (Failure Free Reading). The intervention was designed to give nonreaders and lowest literacy students the opportunity to have an immediate and successful reading experience with age-appropriate materials. A key of the program is reliance on three elements crucial to reading success: (a) adequate repetition; (b) appropriate sentence structure; and (c) meaningful story content. Carefully organized and scripted lessons, talking software, and printed materials are integral parts of the intervention. Improvements were evident in standardized achievement test scores for students participating in the Failure Free Reading program. The intervention appears to have promise for improving achievement of students at risk for literacy failure.

■ A variety of special methods not typically used in general education classrooms have been developed and used with students at risk for severe problems in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wood & Algozzine, 1995). For example, multi-sensory stimulation approaches (e.g., VAKT, Fernald, and Orton-Gillingham methods), neurological impress methods (rapid-unison reading by student and teacher), intensive phonics instruction, and whole-language approaches have been popular over the years (Lerner, 1997). Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) and Success for All (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996) are among the recent additions to this area of study.

Data on the effects of general approaches to improving reading skills are favorable (Lerner, 1997). For example, several studies have been completed on the effects of previewing and various reading practice techniques. Generally, these studies show that listening to a story prior to reading it is very effective and more effective than silent reading alone (Rose, 1984; Rose & Beattie, 1986; Rose & Sherry, 1984). Additionally, other studies have focused on the effects of specific previewing with peers (Salend & Nowak, 1988), using tapes and computers to facilitate basic reading skills and comprehension (Cobb, 1995; Freeman & McLaughlin, 1984), repeated readings (van Bon, Bokseveld, Font Freide, & van den Hurk, 1991; Weinstein & Cooke, 1992), and one-to-one tutoring (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). All these general techniques appear to be effective in improving students' oral

reading fluency, a key to later literacy success (Lerner, 1997).

A few studies have also been completed that reveal significant effects in improving students' oral reading performance when using specific error correction and feedback strategies. For example, supplying correct words while students are struggling to read them and providing extensive practice reading materials focused on sight word vocabulary have been studied by Rosenberg (1986) and Rose, McEntire, & Dowdy (1982). Similar effects (i.e., improvements in reading performance) are obtained when students simply receive feedback (Perkins, 1988; Thorpe, Chiang, & Darch, 1981).

For the most part, data on the effectiveness of more broadly described programs for teaching at-risk readers are equivocal or unconvincing. Consider the following: (a) the Slingerland approach (Lovitt & DeMeir, 1984) was not found to be any more effective than a traditional basal program; (b) studies of Direct Instruction curricula reveal contradictory outcomes, with some studies showing no significant effects (e.g., Kuder, 1990; O'Connor, Jenkins, Cole, & Mills, 1993) and others showing significant effects (e.g., Polloway, Epstein, Polloway, Patton & Ball, 1986); and (c) despite implementation with 78,000 students from 1984-1993, data from Reading Recovery research sites produce an unconvincing scenario on its effectiveness with age cohorts (Hiebert, 1994; Viadero, 1994).

THE PROBLEM

By the year 2020, the majority of America's public school students will be living under conditions that place them at risk for reading failure (Irmsher, 1997). Most schools have reconfigured the curriculum to provide an extra boost to these students. These efforts have resulted in widely varying approaches and outcomes (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). There is a constant and continuing need for effective reading improvement programs. A commercially available program (Failure Free Reading) addresses this need (Lockavitch, 1998).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Practical school-based research has been completed to support Failure Free Reading. Typical findings are illustrated in the following summaries.

- In a study by Lockavitch and Algozzine (1998), twenty-eight third and fourth grade students with low attitudes toward reading and seriously at risk for reading problems were taught word recognition and comprehension skills. The students participated in a maximum instructional period of 30 minutes daily with a teacher who received a brief overview to Failure Free Reading, including talking software. Attitudes toward reading, word recognition, and silent reading scores were similar prior to the implementation. Attitudes of students participating in Failure Free Reading increased to levels comparable to those evident in the control group. Word recognition (Pretest Mean=12.12, Posttest=27.50) and silent reading (Pretest Mean=4.89, Posttest=9.56) performance scores approximately doubled for treatment group students; small nonsignificant differences were evident in these measures for students in control group classrooms. As a result of the success of implementing the Failure Free program, other schools in the district have included it in their efforts to improve skills of at-risk students.
- Seventy students identified as being at risk for reading failure participated in Failure Free Reading instruction (Slate, Lockavitch, & Algozzine, 1998). Pretest Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading measure were approximately one standard deviation below the mean ($M=29.92$, $SD=13.78$), reflecting significantly below average reading performance expected for students at risk for failure. Mean pretest scores on the students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions of attitudes were 53.1 and 34.6 respectively. The students participated in a maximum instructional period of 30 minutes daily with a trained teacher. Significant improvements were evident in word recognition and silent reading. The average number of words read correctly on the posttest ($M=24.66$, $SD=6.99$) was more than twice that read on the pretest ($M=10.40$, $SD=10.01$). Similarly, comprehension scores were almost doubled from pretest ($M=4.57$, $SD=2.09$) to posttest ($M=9.30$, $SD=1.52$). The practical significance

of these outcomes is further illustrated when compared to those obtained in similar research. For example, no differences were indicated in pretest ($M=11.04$, $SD=6.47$) and posttest ($M=15.24$, $SD=5.87$) word recognition performance of control group students in a study by Lockavitch and Algozzine (1998), while treatment group scores more than doubled. Similarly, significant improvements in reading comprehension scores were evident for participating students with no corresponding changes in pretest and posttest scores for control group students (i.e., $M=4.64$: $SD=1.71$, $M=5.71$: $SD=2.09$, respectively).

- Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch, & Algozzine (1998) completed a school-based research study with implications for improving special education services for students with learning disabilities. In their work, 39 students with severe reading problems were taught word recognition and comprehension skills using the Failure Free program. The students participated in a maximum instructional period of 30 minutes daily with a teacher trained in Failure Free Reading. Average grade equivalent improvement of 9-18 months was evident in posttest reading ability scores. Comparisons of pretest/posttest standard score improvements were significant ($p<0.01$) on each reading subtest: Letter Word Identification improved 10 points (14%), Word Attack improved 9 points (11%), Comprehension improved 12 points (15%), and Dictation improved 13 points (17%). Reductions in discrepancies between ability and reading achievement were significant ($p<0.01$) in all areas evaluated. Discrepancies between intellectual ability and reading achievement decreased in more than half of the students. Average posttest discrepancies were less than one standard deviation different and most were one-half standard deviation different or lower.
- Algozzine and Lockavitch (in press) evaluated the performance of 19 first grade students seriously at risk for reading failure who participated in Failure Free Reading implemented as the "Reading is Fun" lab. Low literacy nonreaders selected by the principal and classroom teachers participated 7-8 at a time, in structured computer-based and print material learning experiences guided by a trained teaching assistant. Pretest/posttest comparisons using the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) and reading subsections of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery (WJPB) were significant. Reading subtest scores for the WRAT improved, but Spelling subtest scores did not change. Letter Word Identification, Passage Comprehension, and Broad Reading Cluster scores on the WJPB were significantly different after participating in the program. Greatest gains were evident in Passage Comprehension and the Broad Reading Clusters. District personnel have included the Failure Free Reading program in continuing efforts to meet the needs of students with significant reading problems.

THE SOLUTION

American public education is challenged with large numbers of students at risk and diverse curricular approaches have been advocated to address the growing problem of large-scale failure in school (Gutknecht & Gutknecht, 1997; Indrisano & Chall, 1995; Walker-Dalhouse, 1993). Many of the ills of society have been blamed on reading problems (e.g., chronic unemployment, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency), and teachers have long been involved in adapting instruction to meet the needs of students at risk for failure in key literacy skills (Hiebert, 1994; Marr & Allington, 1994; Sleeter, 1986; Smith, 1934, 1965). The causes for concern are widespread and pervasive: About 80 percent of students with learning disabilities have difficulty reading (Kirk & Elkins, 1975; Lerner, 1997; Lyon, 1985; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995).

When questions arise about how best to teach early reading skills, all fingers point in the direction of a few fundamental factors. According to the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), these include: (a) using reading to obtain meaning from print; (b) having frequent and intensive opportunities to read; (c) being exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships; (d) learning about the nature of the alphabetic writing system; and (e) understanding the structure of spoken words. Further, they indicate that adequate progress in learning to read beyond initial levels depends on:

- a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically,
- sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of text,
- sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting,
- control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings, and
- continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes (pp. 3-4).

Efforts to improve reading and literacy skills also must avoid some pitfalls to be effective:

There are three potential stumbling blocks that are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. The first obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle—the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious. The second obstacle is a failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. The third obstacle to reading will magnify the first two: the absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading. (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, pp. 4-5)

Most literacy scholars agree that the majority of reading problems faced by adolescents and young adults are the result of stumbling blocks, obstacles, and problems that should have been addressed during early elementary school years. Clearly, focusing on a few fundamental factors while avoiding challenges inherent in and/or created by faulty literacy instruction makes the most sense as a method for overcoming reading problems.

The program we evaluated is grounded in much of the research on effective reading instruction and tutorial programs (cf. Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Lerner, 1997; Lockavitch, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1995). Its primary goal is to provide a basic understanding of reading to nonreaders and those with pronounced reading difficulty by employing age appropriate materials, promoting independence in reading, and using a consistent approach with repetition and immediate performance feedback. The program controls three factors critical for reading progress: repetition and practice within a meaningful context, easy and predictable sentence structures, and meaningful story content.

As Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, and O'Connor (1997) indicate, some of these strategies have been incorporated in one-to-one tutoring programs that are being used to prevent reading failure such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) or Success For All (Slavin et al., 1996). These approaches vary in their emphasis on decoding strategies and reading of connected text, skills essential in programs for nonreaders and those with extremely low reading ability (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Further, because of their high cost, programs like Reading Recovery and Success For All that are delivered by specially trained and certificated teachers are available to only a small portion of elementary school students needing supplemental literacy instruction.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effects of a commercially available intensive remedial intervention (hereafter called, Failure Free Reading) on attitudes and reading performance. The approach was selected because it offered several advantages over other special methods typically used with students at risk for continuing and serious failure (e.g., Reading Recovery or Success For All). The program was designed for nonreaders and those with extremely low reading scores (e.g., number of words known ranges from 2 to 50, consistent performance below 50th percentile). For example, in this research, all students reading below the 25th percentile were included and students were not excluded or rejected based on performance during initial lessons. Failure Free Reading was designed for small group instruction of children with the lowest reading levels using principles grounded in best practices in preventing difficulties while providing effective literacy instruction. Success rates with diverse student populations are favorable (Lockavitch, 1998).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Two hundred thirty-five elementary school students referred by classroom teachers as not being ready for first grade and identified as being at risk for reading difficulties participated in the Failure Free Reading program as part of a district-wide Title I program. Ninety-one students were included in the initial implementation of the program; 144 were included in a replication sample the following school year.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Performance data from the state-wide standardized testing program were gathered after participating for two years in the Failure Free Reading program and students had recently completed district-wide third and fourth grade end-of-grade testing. Scaled scores and end-of-grade rubrics (I = Below 25th percentile, II = 26th-50th percentile, III = 51st-75th percentile, IV = 76th-99th percentile) were compared for each group for two years. Levels of performance on the Metropolitan Achievement Test were also compared.

DESIGN AND TREATMENT FIDELITY

A longitudinal cohort comparison group design was used to evaluate the effects of Failure Free Reading implemented within a district-wide Title I program. Treatment fidelity was established and maintained with a series of workshops and observations. Initial training involved introduction to the program and practice engaging the prescribed lesson format (see below). Periodic follow-up training was provided to address questions during implementation and ensure consistent application of the program principles. Random observations were completed by supervisory staff to provide feedback on implementation and identify problems teachers were having. Overall, observations indicated consistent use of the program throughout the study. Subsequently, scores for two groups of students were compared after varying amounts of participation. Additionally, follow-up performance for a subgroup of students discontinued from treatment was also evaluated.

PROCEDURE

The students participated in a maximum instructional period of 30 minutes daily with a teacher trained in the Failure Free Reading program. Though both printed and computerized software materials were available, this particular sample was instructed using printed material only. The approach reduces reading to its simplest form by controlling for context of the material, sentence structure, and story content. The primary instructional procedure involved: previewing material to be read, listening to teacher read, answering factual, inferential, and leading questions, reading the material, and reviewing the material successfully. A typical session included the following literacy activities:

1. **Teacher-Led Pre-Teaching Oral Language Lesson (5-10 minutes):** Teacher previewed material within a structured instructional lesson that set the stage for the students with a brief discussion of the story to follow (e.g., "Today we are going to continue reading our story about going to the park. Who would like to tell me what we have already read?") and other context-based activities. This lesson had a strong language development component, including introduction and explanation of new vocabulary as well as review of previous words. The oral language lesson also included factual, inferential, and prediction comprehension questions. Factual questions covered specific story content to insure that students comprehended all aspects of the story, including vocabulary and theme. Inferential and leading questions were used to increase students' abilities to make meaningful context-based decisions and predictions. This lesson was used to show how sounds are represented alphabetically, to provide background knowledge and vocabulary to render written text meaningful and interesting, to illustrate the use of reading to obtain meaning from print, to teach the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and to foster understanding the structure of spoken words by relating material being read to a meaningful context (cf. Clay, 1985; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
2. **Teacher-Led Guided Instructional Reading Lesson (10-15 minutes):** Teacher engaged students in instructional activities using targeted words, phrases, and sentences. Supervised oral reading practice was included and cloze activities, using single words and phrases (e.g., I am going to the ____), scrambled sentence activities (e.g., going am park I the to), matching activities (e.g., I am going to the [store park school].), and other similar reading recognition tasks were completed with teacher providing supportive and corrective feedback. Actual reading passages were designed to increase competence and confidence through increments in content. For example, a student started reading a brief phrase or sentence (e.g., Today we went to the park.). Each following sentence extended each preceding sentence (e.g., Today we went to the park with mother.) providing multiple occasions for practice. Frequent, intensive opportunities to read as well as high rates of fluency and supervised engagement within the context of vocabulary-controlled, high interest reading materials were the targets of this aspect of the program (cf. Clay, 1985; Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, & O'Connor, 1997).
3. **Independent Print-Based Practice Lesson (10-15 minutes):** Pencil and paper activities similar to those used during the guided instructional activities (e.g., cloze, scrambled sentence, and matching activities) were used to reinforce each lesson and provide practice in reading with different types of text. Spelling activities were also included to reinforce relationships between reading and writing as well as provide additional exposure to sound-symbol relationships and provide opportunities for monitoring progress (cf.

Clay, 1985; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, & O'Connor, 1997).

Although these activities are often included in classroom reading instruction, their simultaneous application within a structured remedial program was a unique intervention for this group of students. The approach was designed to improve word recognition and comprehension performance by having students read controlled passages from a carefully scripted remedial reading intervention. While the importance of critical thinking, knowledge of elements of literature (e.g., audience, genre, authors), and other "higher level" literacy skills was recognized, improving "lower level" skills was deemed more important for the young children experiencing reading difficulties participating in this program.

RELIABILITY

Outcome information was available from the school district database. Performance scores were transferred from reports and summaries to personal computer files by graduate assistants. Line-by-line checks of all dependent data were completed by independent raters to achieve 100% accuracy prior to statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statewide achievement test means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Significant improvements were evident in these standardized test scores. The average improvement in third grade ($M=132.18$, $SD=5.55$) to fourth grade reading performance ($M=138.18$, $SD=6.54$) was statistically significant ($t=-11.20$, $df=90$, $p<0.01$) for the initial group of students. Similarly, the average improvement in third grade ($M=134.77$, $SD=5.55$) to fourth grade reading performance ($M=140.24$, $SD=6.84$) was statistically significant ($t=-11.57$, $df=143$, $p<0.01$) for the replication group of students. Relationships between third and fourth grade performance are illustrated in Table 2. Consistent low (below 25th percentile) third and fourth grade performance was evident for 33% of the students participating in the initial Failure Free cohort on subsequent measures of end-of-grade testing. About the same number (28%) main-

TABLE 1
Achievement and Attitude Scores

Group		STATEWIDE TESTING		Obtained t statistic
		Grade 3	Grade 4	
Failure Free (n = 91)	Mean	132.18	138.18	-11.20*
	SD	5.55	6.54	
Replication (n = 144)	Mean	134.77	140.24	-11.57*
	SD	5.55	6.84	

* $p<0.01$

TABLE 2
Relations Between Performance

Initial Failure Free Students (n=91)

	END-OF-GRADE 4			
	Level I	Level II	Level III	Total
End-Of-Grade 3				
Level I	30 (33%)	14 (15%)	2 (2%)	46(51%)
Level II	10 (11%)	25 (28%)	10(11%)	45(49%)

Replication Failure Free Students (n=144)

	END-OF-GRADE 4			
	Level I	Level II	Level III	Total
End-Of-Grade 3				
Level I	25(17%)	20 (14%)	2 (1%)	47(33%)
Level II	18 (13%)	52 (36%)	27 (19%)	97%(67%)

Rubric Scale: Level I=below 25th percentile, Level II=26th-50th percentile, Level III=51st-75th percentile.

tained below average (Level II) performance. Eleven percent moved from Level II performance in third grade to mastery (Level III) performance in fourth grade. Seventeen percent of the students improved from Level I performance to Level II (15%) or Level III (2%) performance. Eleven percent dropped from Level II to Level I performance in subsequent years.

Consistent low performance was evident for 17% of the students participating in the replication Failure Free cohort on subsequent measures of end-of-grade testing. Thirty-six percent maintained Level II performance. Nineteen percent moved from average performance in third grade to mastery (Level III) performance in fourth grade. Fifteen percent of the students improved from Level I performance to Level II (14%) or Level III (1%) performance. Thirteen percent dropped from Level II to Level I performance in subsequent years.

As a result of assessment after their first year of participation, 46 students were no longer eligible for special services (Level III achievement or better). Two years after being successfully discontinued from the program, 52 percent of these students maintained mastery levels of performance. Three years after being successfully discontinued from the program, 61 percent of these students maintained mastery levels of performance.

Metropolitan Achievement Test performance is presented in Table 3. Prior to participating in the Failure Free program, 91% of the students were performing at the lowest level (i.e., reteach) and 9% were at a higher level. Higher levels of perfor-

TABLE 3
Metropolitan Achievement Test Levels

YEAR	PERFORMANCE LEVEL		
	Reteach	Practice	Apply
Pretest (prior to participation)	167(91%)	16(9%)	0(0%)
Posttest (after one full year)	62(34%)	77(42%)	44(24%)

mance were evident after one year for more than half of the students, including 24% functioning at the application level.

Most at-risk students have difficulties in reading (Imsher, 1997; Kirk & Elkins, 1975; Lyon, 1985; Lerner, 1997; Marr & Allington, 1994; Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Wood & Algozzine, 1995) and very poor reading skills have been blamed for many social problems (e.g., chronic unemployment, dropping out of school, and juvenile delinquency). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) concluded that (a) opportunity to learn the alphabetic principle (i.e., understanding that letters represent sounds and there are orderly ways in which letters represent the sounds of English); (b) opportunity to read for meaning (i.e., understanding that words convey information and ideas); and (c) opportunity to practice reading to achieve fluency (i.e., reading individual words quickly enough that meaning can be constructed with ease) were critical to reading success for young children. The Failure Free program controls key factors critical for reading progress: repetition and practice within a meaningful context, using easy and predictable sentence structures and meaningful story content. It is grounded in a set of fundamental beliefs:

- America's schools are full of students who have failed to learn to read at acceptable levels based on their age and grade. Target students for Failure Free Reading are the lowest of these low readers. No students are excluded and all students, regardless of current reading level, are welcomed.
- Over the years, many theories regarding the cause(s) of reading failure have been popular. Knowledge about reasons for previous failure and/or the extent of it are not critical to success in our program. Students with all personal, educational, and instructional histories are welcomed.
- A critical factor for success in reading is having sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting. In Failure Free Reading, students move quickly into meaningful connected text to experience reading at age-appropriate levels.
- Reading success is highly related to repetition (some low readers require 50-100 repetitions before recognizing some words). Good readers have had sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of text. High rates of structured practice reading predictable content in controlled sentences are a hallmark of Failure Free Reading.
- A stumbling block to reading success is a failure to trans-

fer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. In Failure Free Reading, students practice comprehension as well as word recognition.

Over the years, reading improvement bandwagons have come and gone. At times, debate over their value has achieved monumental proportion (e.g., phonics vs. whole language) with little more left after all the rhetoric has cleared than the expected swing of the pendulum. Failure Free Reading was developed after considerable experience working with the lowest of the low readers in elementary school classrooms. It has had the same goal for more than 15 years: Provide a basic understanding of the reading process to nonreaders and those with pronounced reading difficulty by employing age appropriate materials, promoting independence in reading, and using a consistent approach with repetition and immediate performance feedback.

The results of this study add to the growing body of literature supporting Failure Free Reading. For example, the practical effects of implementing this program are similar to those associated with broader, more expensive, more labor-intensive programs. For example, in "an evaluation of Reading Recovery," Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred, and McNaught (1995) reported posttest effect sizes ranging from 0.42 on the Syntactic Awareness Cloze Test to 3.05 on Clay's book level test. Effect sizes on comparable measures of reading recognition and silent reading ranged from 1.14 to 2.85 when students participating in Failure Free Reading were compared to control groups of their peers (Lockavitch & Algozzine, 1998). These large effect sizes favor the Failure Free students on all outcome measures. In another study, Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch, & Algozzine (1998) reported improved reading performance and decreased discrepancies between ability and achievement in a group of students with reading disabilities after using the Failure Free program to supplement their reading instruction. While additional effectiveness research is needed, it appears that this innovative program can be successful with students who fail to profit from traditional reading programs. The benefits of this approach include the following: (a) an organized intervention grounded in components of effective reading instruction (e.g., repeated reading within a meaningful context, easy and predictable sentence structures, and meaningful story content); (b) carefully sequenced activities building on key components of successful reading lessons (e.g., previewing, listening, answering comprehension questions, independent reading, and structured review); and (c) practical use with scripted materials that minimize the need for extensive teacher preparation and training.

Although the commercially available Failure Free Reading materials were evaluated in this research, principles embodied in this program can be implemented in any classroom:

1. Spend 5-10 minutes reviewing and previewing content to be addressed in the day's lesson. Ensure that each student responds to simple questions designed to focus attention on

the language used in the literacy experience (e.g., "Today we are going to read about going to the park. What are we going to read about today?"). Also, provide opportunities for students to see, hear, and say previous words and new story content (e.g., "Here are some new words we will be learning: 'mother,' 'store.' What is this word?").

- Engage students in 10-15 minutes of reading and doing structured exercises using previous and new words. Have each student read aloud and provide supportive and corrective feedback. Be sure each student can read the words included in structured exercises used to provide reinforcement and practice. Vary the format of the exercises to engage students' interests and demonstrate generalization of reading skills. Manage the content presented in the exercises so that the ratio of known to unknown words is favorable.

- Engage students in 10-15 minutes of independent activities providing reading practice. Vary the format of these activities, but carefully control the content (i.e., the words being read) to eliminate frustration and ensure proper progress.

Studies have demonstrated that poor readers spend less than 10 minutes a day reading (cf. Wood & Algozzine, 1995). With application of the principles embodied in Failure Free Reading, this bleak statistic will no longer be blamed for reading failure.

Please see the back of this issue for guidelines on "Putting it to Work."

REFERENCES

- Algozzine, B. & Lockavitch, J.F. (in press). Effects of failure free reading program on students at risk for reading failure. *Special Services in the Schools*.
- Center, Y., Wheldall, K., Freeman, L., Outhred, L., & McNaught, M. (1995). An evaluation of Reading Recovery. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 240-263.
- Clay, M.M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cobb, J.B. (1995). Microcomputers: Bridging the gap for at-risk readers. *Preventing School Failure*, 40, 37-40.
- Freeman, T.J. & McLaughlin, T.F. (1984). Effects of a taped-words treatment procedure on learning disabled students' sight-word oral reading. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 7, 49-54.
- Gutknecht, B.A. & Gutknecht, C.D. (1997). Challenging at-risk/resilient learners: Alternatives to minimal level literacy instruction. *Reading Improvement*, 34, 8-21.
- Hiebert, E.H. (1994). Reading recovery in the United States: What difference does it make to an age cohort? *Educational Researcher*, 23(9), 15-25.
- Indrisano, R. & Chall, J.S. (1995). Literacy development. *Journal of Education*, 177, 63-83.
- Irmsher, K. (1997). Education reform and students at risk. *ERIC Digest*, Number 112 [ED405642].
- Kirk, S.A. & Elkins, J. (1975). Characteristics of children enrolled in Child Service Demonstration Centers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 8, 630-637.
- Kuder, S. (1990). Effectiveness of the DISTAR reading program for children with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23, 69-71.
- Lerner, J. (1997). *Learning disabilities: Theories, diagnosis, and teaching strategies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lockavitch, J. (1998). *Don't close the book on your not-yet reader*. Concord, NC: JFL Enterprises.
- Lockavitch, J. & Algozzine, B. (1998). Effects of intensive intervention on students at-risk for reading failure. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Lovitt, T.C. & DeMeir, D.M. (1984). An evaluation of the Slingerland method with LD youngsters. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 17, 267-272.
- Lyon, R. (1985). Education validation studies of learning disabilities subtypes. In B. Rourke (Ed.), *Learning disabilities in children: Advances in subtype analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Marr, M.B. & Allington, R. (1994). Changes in the identification and instruction of high-risk readers. In K.D. Wood & B. Algozzine (Eds.), *Teaching reading to high risk readers* (pp. 83-97). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- O'Connor, R.E., Jenkins, J.R., Cole, K.N., & Mills, P.E. (1993). Two approaches to reading instruction with children with disabilities: Does program design make a difference? *Exceptional Children*, 59, 312-323.
- Perkins, V.L. (1988). Feedback effects on oral reading errors of children with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 21, 244-248.
- Polloway, E.A., Epstein, M.H., Polloway, C.H., Patton, J.R., & Ball, D.W. (1986). Corrective reading program: An analysis of effectiveness with learning disabled and mentally retarded students. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7(4), 41-47.
- Rankhorn, B., England, G., Collins, S.M., Lockavitch, J.F. & Algozzine, B. (1998). Effects of the failure free reading program on students with severe reading disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31, 307-312.
- Rose, T.L. (1984). The effects of two prepractice procedures on oral reading. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 17, 544-548.
- Rose, T.L. & Beattie, J.R. (1986). Relative effects of teacher-directed and taped previewing on oral reading. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 9, 193-199.
- Rose, T.L., McEntire, E., & Dowdy, C. (1982). Effects of two error-correction procedures on oral reading. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 5, 100-105.
- Rose, T.L. & Sherry, L. (1984). Relative effects of two previewing procedures on LD adolescents' oral reading performance. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 7, 39-44.
- Rosenberg, M.S. (1986). Error-correction during oral reading: A comparison of three techniques. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 9, 182-192.

- Salend, S.J. & Nowak, M.R. (1988). Effects of peer-previewing on LD students' oral reading skills. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 10, 47-53.
- Slate, J.R., Algozzine, B., & Lockavitch, J.F. (1998). Effects of intensive remedial reading instruction. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Slavin, R.E., Madden, N.A., Dolan, L.J., & Wasik, B.A. (1996). *Every child, every school: Success for all*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin.
- Sleeter, C. (1986). Learning disabilities: The social construction of a special education category. *Exceptional Children*, 53, 46-54.
- Smith, N.B. (1934/1965). *American reading instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Thorpe, H.W., Chiang, B., & Darch, C.B. (1981). Individual and group feedback systems for improving oral reading accuracy in learning disabled and regular class children. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 14, 332-334.
- Torgesen, J. (1995). Instruction for reading disabled children: Questions about knowledge into practice. *Issues in Education*, 1, 91-96.
- Vadasy, P.F., Jenkins, J.R., Antil, L.R., Wayne, S.K., & O'Connor, R.E. (1997). Community-based early reading intervention for at-risk first graders. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 12, 29-39.
- van Bon, W., Bokseveld, L., Font Freide, T., & van der Hurk, A. (1991). A comparison of three methods of reading-while-listening. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 24, 471-483.
- Viadero, D. (1994). Report cases critical eye on Reading Recovery program. *Education Week*, December 7.
- Walker-Dalhouse, D. (1993). Beginning reading and the African American child at risk. *Young Children*, 49, 24-28.
- Wasik, B.A. & Slavin, R.E. (1993). Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 28, 179-200.
- Weinstein, G. & Cooke, N.L. (1992). The effects of two repeated reading interventions on generalization of fluency. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 15, 21-28.
- Wood, K.D. & Algozzine, B. (1995). *Teaching reading to high-risk learners: A unified perspective*. Boston: Allyn Bacon.
- Ysseldyke, J.E. & Algozzine, B. (1995). *Special education: A practical approach for teachers* (3rd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Volume 1, Number 2

PROVEN PRACTICE

PREVENTION &

REMEDICATION

SOLUTIONS

FOR SCHOOLS

*A Journal for Educators
Translating Research to Practice*

Accelerating the Growth Curve: Improving Opportunities for Children at Risk for Reading Failure

Joseph F. Lockavitch

Concord, North Carolina

Lillian Morgan

Salisbury, North Carolina

Bob Algozzine

University of North Carolina, Charlotte

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

TARGET STUDENTS

Students who will benefit from Failure Free Reading are those at risk for or experiencing significant reading failure, including students with the lowest reading levels at any grade level.

TARGET SETTING/CONTEXT

Failure Free Reading works as a supplement to literacy instruction in public and private elementary schools. General and special education classrooms are equally appropriate environments for implementation.

TARGET BEHAVIORS

Improved word recognition, comprehension, and attitudes are appropriate intervention targets.

PROCEDURES

Baseline Assessment

- Prior to implementing intervention, identify current levels of word recognition skills using curriculum-based measures.
- Prior to implementing intervention, identify current levels of reading comprehension skills using curriculum-based measures.
- Prior to implementing intervention, identify current attitudes toward school, learning, and reading.

Intervention

Failure Free Reading is a commercially available product (Lockavitch, 1998). Principles embodied in the program's carefully crafted lessons (e.g., age appropriate materials, consistent approach emphasizing repetition, feedback, controlled sentence structure, and meaningful story content) can be incorporated into any remedial reading program. To use principles evident in Failure Free Reading lessons, engage the following steps:

- Preview reading content to set the stage for activities that follow. Review key words and concepts, present new material, and provide comprehension questions addressing the content of current lesson.
- Present instructional activities using target words, phrases, and sentences. Begin with words, followed by phrases and sentences as students' reading skills improve. Have students practice oral reading skills using a variety of activities (e.g., cloze, fill in the blank, and scrambled sentences as well as "find the right word" tasks). Provide supportive feedback (e.g., "That's great reading." "You read every word in the sentence, 'Today we are going to the park' correctly.") for correct performance and corrective feedback (e.g., "No, that word is 'park,' not 'party.'") for incorrect performance.
- Provide independent practice activities using the same formats provided during teacher-directed lessons. Circulate among class members providing supportive and corrective feedback based in individual performances.

Follow-up Assessment:

- After implementing intervention, identify present levels of word recognition skills using curriculum-based measures.
- After implementing intervention, identify present levels of reading comprehension skills using curriculum-based measures.
- After implementing intervention, identify present attitudes toward school, learning, and reading.
- Compare baseline and follow-up reading performance and attitudes after at least six weeks of intervention.

For sample materials and specific illustrations of Failure Free Reading lessons, contact Dr. Joseph F. Lockavitch, JFL Enterprises, 136 Corbin Court, Concord, NC 28025, 704-786-7838.