

Catching Reading Struggles Early

Summary: It goes without saying that the earlier teachers can intervene with a struggling reader, the better. In an article for *Better: Evidence-Based Education*, a Florida State University professor details best practices for catching struggling readers early and turning them around.

Practical Applications

The author talks about both what the classroom teacher can do and what supplemental interventions can help. Based on a great deal of research coming out of the Florida Center for Reading Research, the following is suggested for the classroom teacher:

- Use a core literacy program that balances both decoding and comprehension instruction, and use a variety of small-group instruction and personalized materials to meet students' specific needs
- Monitor progress by recording data on key indicators, such as how many letter sounds or sight words each student can read.
- Use data to group students flexibly – deliberately either putting together students who struggle in the same area for a small-group session, or grouping those students with students who are strong in that area.

When using outside tutors (parents, volunteers, etc.) as an intervention, make sure to:

- Having a reading specialist, teacher or other expert train and supervise the tutors
- Ensuring the tutoring intervention is aligned with classroom instruction
- Make sure the program has a heavy emphasis on phonics, but also with re-reading of books
- Closely monitor student progress
- Build in enough time for the intervention to run its course (generally, unsurprisingly, the longer both in terms of days of the week and time per session, the better)

Conclusion and Citation

Applying best instructional practices while simultaneously monitoring student progress and using that data to make grouping decisions is a proven way to help identify students who may become struggling readers. This early identification and intervention is a key to helping those students change from struggling readers into strong readers.

Al-Otabia, S. "Early Identification and Prevention of Reading Problems." *Better: Evidence-Based Education*, (Fall 2011), pp. 22-23. <http://bit.ly/xVAnJP> (subscription only).