



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Key Recommendations From the IES Practice Guide

Michael L. Kamil, Ph.D. • January 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Highlights

- There is a crisis in middle and high school literacy. Reading levels are low, and many middle and high school teachers are not prepared to teach reading.
- The IES panel has developed five recommended practices for improving adolescent literacy: explicit vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategy instruction, text discussion, motivation and engagement, and individualized intervention.
- Teachers need support in developing the skills needed to teach reading across content areas.

About the Interviewee

Michael L. Kamil is Professor of Education at Stanford University. He is a member of the Psychological Studies in Education Committee and is on the faculty of the Learning, Design, and Technology Program. He received his B. A.

from Tulane University and his M.A. and Ph. D. from the University of Wisconsin. Currently he serves as an advisor to the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program for the Department of Education. He also serves as chair of the research panel for the New York State English Language Arts Standards Revision. He is a member of the United States Steering Committee for the United States involvement in the 2009 administration of the Program in International Student Assessment (PISA). In addition he is a member of the Adolescent Literacy Advisory Board for the Alliance for Excellent Education.

He was a member of the National Reading Panel, chairing the subgroups on comprehension, technology, and teacher education and was a member of the RAND Corporation Reading Study Group, which produced the report *Reading for Understanding: Toward an R&D Program in Reading Comprehension*. He was also a member of the National Literacy Panel, synthesizing reading research on language minority students. He was Chair of the Planning Committee for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Framework. In addition, he was a member of the Carnegie Corporation Advisory Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy. He currently is a member of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Partnership for Accessible Reading Assessments. He also is Chair of the PREL Reading Advisory Panel.

He has recently served as the Chair of the group that produced *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, a practice guide from the Institute of Education Sciences. Other publications have included the *Handbooks of Reading Research*, Volumes I-III. Currently he is the lead editor for the forthcoming Volume IV. A volume on vocabulary instruction and one on early childhood professional development are in preparation.

Full Transcript

I'm Michael Kamil; I'm a Professor of Education at Stanford University, and I was chair of the committee that put together the Practice Guide on Improving Adolescent Literacy. The goals of the panel in creating the Practice Guide for Adolescent Literacy was to create a document that would serve as an informative guide to curricular practices for teachers in middle and high school.

The Practice Guide is important for administrators and teachers because the major crisis we have at the moment is in middle and high school literacy. We've got students who are so far behind that they will never catch up. We're denying them the opportunity to pursue advanced degrees, to pursue careers of their own choice, and we limit the usefulness that they will serve in society. The problem has been that middle and high school teachers often don't believe that it's their job to teach reading, that that should happen in elementary school. And because of that, we are trying to change the attitude and provide some simple-to-implement practices—maybe some that aren't so simple to implement, as well—to give them an idea of what they could do immediately to improve the reading of their students.

The guide has five recommended practices that came directly out of the research. So those are number

one, students need explicit vocabulary instruction. This isn't a very popular idea for a long time because vocabulary is thought to occur almost naturally or as a result of wide reading. What we found is that it needs to be taught and needs to be taught very explicitly. This is critical in content areas where vocabulary carries the load of the meaning.

The second thing is that we know that students benefit if we teach them comprehension strategies, and they need to be taught explicitly again. So, this is how to approach a text and either construct or extract or understand the meaning of that text. This, again, is the result of careful analysis of the research and is very clear it's one of the most potent instructional interventions that we can use.

The third recommendation is that students need to engage in discussion about text. This is probably the most unusual of the recommendations because it's the result of very recent analysis of the research that shows that students do extremely well when they are engaged in collaboratively discussing the text. This tends to be focused on literature in the research at the moment, but is very clearly applicable to content area material as well.

The fourth recommendation is motivation of students, that we need to make sure that students are motivated to read and engaged in the reading task. For the purpose of the website, we've collapsed motivation and engagement with discussion around text because discussion around text is one way of increasing the engagement of students with that text.

The last recommendation is about targeted and intensive tutoring for students whose problems are more serious than those that can be handled by the classroom teacher. The teacher needs to be able to identify those students and recommend that they be helped by a specialist who can arrange for tutoring in either individual or small group sessions. This is tutoring that goes well beyond the normal classroom regimen of instruction and is the way to bring students who are far behind in their achievement in literacy up to grade level or as near as possible.

So, the way we can support teachers and administrators in implementing these is through organized, sustained, and intensive professional development. We need to make sure that the coaches that we're putting into schools at the moment are capable of helping teachers reach these goals of implementing the practices that we have. Recent studies have shown that literacy is one of the best predictors of achievement in math and in science. Now, what the principal needs to know is that we have to implement professional development for those teachers in the content areas to help them do literacy instruction in each of those content areas. That means being supportive in terms of professional development. It means creating an infrastructure that allows time for both planning and implementation, and it means that we have to have a cadre of other administrators who might replace that principal someday when the principal moves on so that there's an institutional memory about the program.

Students have shown some improvement, in fact dramatic and historical improvement, through third grade. We need to continue working instructionally to maintain those improvements. The situation in many of our schools today with regard to literacy is that students are so far behind that it's almost like a trauma care unit that we need to institute. This Practice Guide provides some suggestions that will move the field and all the education at middle and high school level to improve the lot of those students and open up those opportunities for all those students that we are now underserving.