

A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH CONNECTIONS SUPPORTING “READING IS FOR EVERYONE”: AN ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

Literally thousands of articles have been written about early intervention and tutoring assistance programs for elementary and secondary school students. Models such as the America Reads program have received nationwide acceptance as a valid intervention tool. Its planning and program development coordinator, Jana Potter, says in her report compiled for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, So That Every Child Can Read, “In their rich diversity of organizational norms, tutor recruitment, placement, training and support, such programs show that there are many roads up the mountain. The common goal of all, of course is children across the nation becoming more adept readers.” Although “Reading is for Everyone” originally was developed by simple observation of what struggling readers need to succeed and the will to create a program convenient for adult or peer participants as well as valuable to elementary school students, many of its components run parallel to successful volunteer reading tutoring programs and all are supported by leading-edge reading research. The creator of the model, Cathy Puett Miller, combines over seven years of actual tutoring experience with a library science degree and close collaboration with Kennesaw State University’s and Reinhardt College’s Early Education Department. Her project management and volunteer management experience add substantially to the package.

What makes the “Reading is for Everyone” program unique is the emphasis on :

- combining research-based concepts for teaching with an approach to teaching the neglected “behavior” of reading,
- organization and community-building,
- a focus on positive experiences with reading and
- an ability to target valuable resources already in the school.

Creating a clear, logical plan builds a cooperative effort. The ingredients for a successful “Reading is for Everyone” implementation include:

- initial needs assessment to identify parameters for student participation and support of school objectives, plus to identify appropriate materials for use in the program
- a plan of action, including a timeline and organization for initial implementation of the model (this includes a plan for assessment of the program’s effectiveness and frequent communication between all parties involved)
- training of school staff or volunteers for on-going management of the program

- tutor training in research-based methods for reading instruction
- design of forms and introductory promotional materials for “advertising” the program. These cover issues such as confidentiality, commitment to a set amount of time and lesson planning/tracking of student activities
- initial support for volunteer recruitment and instructions for building continued collaboration within the community
- acquisition of initial gift books for participating students (some of materials may be “granted gifts” from organizations such as Rolling Readers or RIF)
- parent education workshops, including joint activities with parents and children and practical “start where you are” ideas for empowering parents to work with their children on educational issues at home

This report highlights research supporting these components and emphasizing their importance in an overall literacy approach to supplement activities in the classroom. Cathy Puett Miller, as an independent literacy consultant, delivers the model to the school and gives in-service training and support for the first 30-60 days of implementation. An end-of-the-year evaluation of the program’s effectiveness, using standardized test scores, informal diagnostic evaluations classroom grades, comes as a part of the initial contract. Whether a school is beginning a new program or enhancing an existing one, Mrs. Miller’s “Reading Is For Everyone” concept creates an effective, successful environment. Her individualized approach helps schools or their support groups (such as parent/teacher organizations, social service agencies or volunteer service organizations) evaluate whether materials are scientifically-based in mainstream reading research and gives them the tools to ensure accurate implementation and evaluation. She puts the emphasis on the “how to” of successful tutoring efforts.

Initial synchronization of program policies with school policies and a shared vision for students becoming good readers is the foundation on which the entire process is established. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory’s So That Every Child Can Read : a review of effective practices in volunteer reading tutoring programs points this out as a lesson learned in operational norms. They also identify “clearly delineated goals and responsibilities” as critical in successful tutoring efforts. Mrs. Miller’s approach allows plenty of time, but a proven model, to tailor the program for maximum effectiveness in each particular school. One school, for example, may choose to target children new to that school, another may choose to concentrate on upper classmen, preparing them for the leap to the next level of education, a third might target students below grade level but not identified for early intervention programs or special resources. The initial evaluation/assessment helps identify the neediest areas and focuses there first.

Often included as part of the “Reading is for Everyone” package is professional development for teachers and/or tutors. These seminars will always contain research on phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, fluency and reading comprehension (key areas for children learning to read as defined by the National Reading Panel’s 2000 Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction report. The model also includes for every school an element of parent education in the form of a tear-off sheet of tips for parents. Conferences with parents of children participating in “Reading is for Everyone” is also an available component as well as group parenting workshops, teaching parents the skills they need to interact with their children and books.

Resources such as the Atlanta Jewish Coalition for Literacy, Drs. Jeanne Shay and Gerald E. Schumm’s book, The Reading Tutor’s Handbook, The AmericCorps Tutoring Program and the Region IV Comprehensive Center of Emory and Henry College’s program manual, “Recruiting and Training Volunteer Tutors for Emergent and Beginning Readers” represent tutoring efforts with a strong basis in research. Mrs. Miller’s approach is validated as it focuses on these proven methods. She also brings experience in practical application of this model over the past seven years and her continued education in mainstream reading research to ensure “Reading is for Everyone” uses solid, proven methods.

The remainder of this report will continue to outline research foundations upon which the model for “Reading Is For Everyone” was based. It particularly focuses on the elements of “Reading is for Everyone” which address the instruction of the children. Although no specific product is recommended for use with these students, Mrs. Miller suggests those that include key ingredients for teaching students to read.

The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (2000) identifies three key ingredients in teaching children to read and sets the broad base for the “Reading is for Everyone” concept:

Alphabetics (including phonemic Awareness Instruction and phonics instruction),
fluency, and
comprehension (including vocabulary and text comprehension instruction).

Emphasis on these three areas is included in the training of “Reading Is For Everyone” tutors and specific examples and instructional methods are modeled. The “Reading Is For Everyone” Student Nomination Form contains a section for identification of “challenge” areas for individual students and these key components are specifically identified. Teachers check those that apply to the individual child they nominate so the child receives specific, explicit instruction in the identified areas first.

Findings in this same report from the National Reading Panel also suggest that 25-30 minute sessions on average are most effective (“Reading is for Everyone” sessions are 30 minutes each). This panel also states that “Phonics instructions is never a total reading program”. Having discovered this independently, the “Reading is for Everyone” creator also incorporates guided reading exercises and a focus on reading as a purposeful, pleasurable and successful experience into each session.

The conclusion in the “fluency” area of the National Reading Panel report was that repeated reading, and other oral reading procedures have clear value for improving reading ability. Studies conducted by researchers such as Faulkner and Levy, (1999), Turpie & Parratore (1995) and Bon, Boksebel, Freide, and Van den Hark (1991) were cited as specific examples. Michael Pressley supports this approach in his research as well (contributions to The Handbook of Reading Research) when he states, that fluency “strategies are taught over time and with plenty of practice.” “Reading is for Everyone” gives students opportunities for all these within the context of the individual tutoring session and tutors are trained to use these techniques.

Share, Jorm, Maclean, & Matthews, in a 1984 article in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, detail findings that teaching children to manipulate phonemes in words was highly effective across all literacy domains and outcomes and that these measures best predict how well students will be reading at the end of kindergarten and first grade. Phonemic activities are used whenever this element needs reinforcement, either as supplied by Mrs. Miller or from research-based materials already in use at the school. Word activities and games exploring word families as well as review of sight words are a part of each “Reading is For Everyone” session. This article also supports the concept that alphabetic instruction is helpful to all types of children, including those at risk and disabled readers as well as those learning to read in English and normally developing readers (“Reading is for Everyone” most often targets the first two or three groups).

Rinaldi and MacLaughlin (1997) cite a common “game” in which sight words are repeatedly reviewed until the student has learned them to the point of automaticity. “Reading is for Everyone” creator Cathy Miller provides each participating school with an exercise plan for reviewing sight word lists with students until complete success is achieved. Additionally, timed sight word readings, in a relaxed, fun forum, are recommended.

Allington (1977) in the *Journal of Reading* identified that students who need the most practice in reading spend the least amount of time in actual reading. Further studies such as that of Cunningham & Stanovich, (1998) & Krashen, (1993) confirm the link between the amount of reading and reading achievement. “Reading Is For Everyone” is designed to give students a structured weekly opportunity for practicing decoding, fluency and comprehension. Outreach beyond the tutoring session through informal reading

assignments encourage the child to read on his/her own. Recommendations to family members and assistance in the form of instruction also extend support into the home.

A study by Brett (1996), documentation of which appeared in the *Elementary School Journal* (1977), found that even fourth grade students who were given pre-instruction on target words in the story had greater vocabulary gains and greater success in reading the text with fluency and good comprehension than children in the non-instructional control group. “Reading is for Everyone” encourages discussion and interaction with the child about the text they are reading, plus identification of unfamiliar, difficult words before the text is actually read. This also allows the child to find more success in their reading experience by targeting these potential problem words before the text is read.

Marilyn Jager Adams documented numerous studies in her book, “Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print (2000). One study cited “the need for practice in reading, for exposure to a lot of reading materials as input to vocabulary learning and for motivating, interesting reading materials.”

“Reading is for Everyone” takes this approach by matching students who need that extra practice with the ready ear and hands of tutors. Tutors incorporate techniques such as guided reading, paired reading, visualization and learning to use context and other clues to help with comprehension and decoding. In addition, tutors are instructed in the importance of finding ways for students to experience some success in each session, adding to their motivation. Michael Graves, head of the Literacy Education Program at the University of Minnesota, ties in the importance of motivation when he says,

A successful reading experience is one in which students understand the selection, learn from it, enjoy it, and achieve the goals you and they have set. Moreover, such an experience leaves students realizing that they have been successful, recognizing that they have dealt competently with the selection. If students are to become successful readers -- adults who can and do read, both to gain information and for the pleasure and satisfaction that reading can provide -- the vast majority of their reading experiences must be successful ones.

Finally, for purposes of implementing the Reading Excellent Act, the U.S. Department of Education has identified six key reform areas for the classroom, as part of the REA Model:

- motivation,
- phonemic awareness,
- decoding,
- fluency,
- vocabulary and
- comprehension strategies

These key reform areas are identified as focuses for materials and instructional methods used in the tutoring sessions and tutors receive training as necessary to understand these terms and to be able to identify them in instructional materials. Every child in every session touches on these components. This ties the "Reading is for Everyone" experience closely to instruction happening in the classroom and targets proven areas of reading instruction.

TRACK RECORD

Since "Reading is for Everyone's" inception in 1997, participating schools have shared with Mrs. Miller on an informal basis the progress of students and the programs in general. In addition, with her involvement in end of the year evaluation of the student progress, she is able to compile blind statistics documenting this for "Reading is for Everyone" sites as a whole. Combining review of test scores for students participating in RIFE with surveys of all participants have given a consistent picture.

In growing from 8 tutors in 1997 to over 200 tutors per semester at present, the results have been consistent. Only three isolated cases have resulted in a student recording no improvement. Overall, students participating in "Reading is for Everyone" improved at a rate of 7-20% faster than their peers in the general school population on basic literacy test scores. Some students experience as much as a 40-50% faster rate of improvement. As anticipated, the additional intervention resulted in a shorter learning curve for those students and a new-found enthusiasm for reading according to teachers. A teacher with children participating in "Reading is for Everyone" for over four years says, "The attention, focus and reinforcement are priceless." Another comments, "Mary *loves* her tutor and has grown to love reading. Your program ["Reading is for Everyone"] is opening doors for many children. I'm sure Mary is just one of the many successes to come." Furthermore, teachers report in exit evaluation forms that most students show an increase in self-esteem and confidence in reading plus enjoy the one-to-one practice time. Classroom instructors view it as a critical way to encourage more independent reading among "Reading is for Everyone" students.

Key to the continuation of any tutoring effort is the satisfaction of participants. Tutors return year after year in the "Reading is for Everyone" program because they find it fulfilling and worthwhile. One tutor (a volunteer student from a local university's early education department) says, "I tutor at one of the 'Reading is for Everyone' programs each Thursdays morning. The child I tutor is improving a little each week and I'm really glad I had the opportunity to participate. I have definitely learned a lot about how to teach a child to read." Rated for effectiveness by parents, teachers and tutors, the individual programs averaged an 8.9 rating on a scale of 1-10.

MOVING FORWARD

A core of successful reading instruction in the tutoring environment is motivation and there is no better avenue than a personal relationship with someone who cares to stir that into activity. Focusing heavily on reading choice, success at every session and a progression planned in conjunction with the student’s language arts or reading teacher and/or school curriculum means improved skills and performance for every child. Many students below grade level remain there throughout their academic careers simply because a number of the essential building blocks are missing. “Reading is for Everyone” provides the avenue for those components to be enforced. Comprehension and connecting the text with personal experience and background and to other text are skills that can be taught and the bridge to engaged reading..

Since “Reading is for Everyone” represents a complex, comprehensive organizational model, all the individual details have not been addressed in this publication. For more information, contact The Literacy Ambassador, Cathy Puett Miller, at 770-345-3001 or cathypmiller@starband.net.

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