

Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading -- A New Initiative by the International Dyslexia Association



Louisa Moats, Ed.D.

Reprinted with permission of Pennsylvania-Delaware IDA

Students with Reading Disabilities Depend on Skilled Teaching

Although dyslexia and related reading and language problems may originate with neurobiological differences, they are mainly treated with skilled teaching. Informed and effective classroom instruction, especially in the early grades, can prevent or at least effectively address and limit the severity of reading and writing problems. Potential reading failure can be recognized as early as preschool and kindergarten, if not sooner. A large body of research evidence shows that with appropriate, intensive instruction, all but the most severe reading disabilities can be ameliorated in the early grades and students can get on track toward academic success. For those students with persistent dyslexia who need specialized instruction outside of the regular class, competent intervention from a specialist can lessen the impact of the disorder and help the student overcome and manage the most debilitating symptoms.

What is the nature of effective instruction for students at risk? The methods supported by research are those that are explicit, systematic, cumulative, and multisensory, in that they integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The content of effective instruction emphasizes the structure of language, including the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), meaning relationships among words and their referents (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse. The strategies emphasize planning, organization, attention to task, critical thinking, and self-management. While all such aspects of teaching are essential for students with poor reading and language skills, these strategies also enhance the potential of all students.

Are Teachers Prepared?

Teaching language, reading, and writing effectively, especially to students experiencing difficulty, requires considerable knowledge and skill. Regrettably, the licensing and professional development practices currently endorsed by many states are insufficient for the preparation and support of teachers and specialists. Researchers are finding that those with reading specialist and

IDA Professional Standards

special education licenses often know no more about research-based, effective practices than those with general education teaching licenses, and the overall level of knowledge is inadequate for effective teaching. The majority of practitioners at all levels have not been prepared in sufficient depth to prevent reading problems, to recognize early signs of risk, or to teach students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities successfully. Inquiries into teacher preparation in reading have revealed a pervasive absence of rich content and academic rigor in many courses that lead to certification of teachers and specialists. Analyses of teacher licensing tests show that typically, very few are aligned with current research on effective instruction for students at risk. When tests are aligned with scientific research, far too many teacher candidates are unable to pass them – a reality that became evident last spring when a rigorous new test was required of teacher candidates in Connecticut. To address these gaps and promote more rigorous, meaningful, and effective teacher preparation and professional development, IDA has adopted a comprehensive set of knowledge and practice standards for the training of teachers of reading.

The Purpose of IDA's Standards

IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards are to be used to guide the preparation, certification, and professional development of those who teach reading and related literacy skills in classroom, remedial, and clinical settings. The standards aim to specify what any individual responsible for teaching reading should know and be able to do so that reading difficulties, including dyslexia, may be prevented, alleviated, or remediated. In addition, the standards seek to differentiate classroom teachers from therapists or specialists who are qualified to work with the most challenging students.

Although programs that certify or support teachers, clinicians, or specialists differ in their preparation methodologies, teaching approaches, and organizational purposes, they should ascribe to a common set of professional standards for the benefit of the students they serve. Compliance with these standards should assure the public that individuals who teach in public and private schools, as well as those who teach in clinics, are prepared to implement scientifically based and clinically proven practices.

The standards outline three critical dimensions of teacher preparation: 1) *content knowledge* necessary to teach reading and writing to students with dyslexia or related disorders or who are at risk for reading difficulty; 2) *practices of effective instruction*; and 3) *ethical conduct* expected of professional educators and clinicians. Regular classroom teachers should also have the foundational knowledge of language, literacy development, and individual differences because they share responsibility for preventing and ameliorating reading problems.

In conclusion, the challenges of educating students with reading difficulties cannot be met simply through program prescriptions or achievement ² mandates. Programs do not teach – teachers do. Teachers must be smarter than their programs. While some programs may be better written than others, they will not have an effect unless the people implementing them can make decisions about what to do with whom, for how long, and under what conditions, and unless they are willing to carry out the hard work of instruction over a considerable period. This takes lots of the right kind of training and support. Let's keep our focus on what matters most: teaching, for our students' futures.

References

- Bos, C., Mather, N., Dickson, S., Podhajski, B., & Chard, D. (2001). Perceptions and knowledge of preservice and inservice educators about early reading instruction. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 51, 97–120.
- Cunningham, A. E., Perry, K. E., Stanovich, K. E., & Stanovich, P. J. (2004). Disciplinary knowledge of K-3 teachers and their knowledge calibration in the domain of early literacy. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 54, 139–167.
- Joshi, R. M., Binks, E., Hougen, M., Ocker-Dean, E., Graham, L., & Smith, D. (2009). Teachers' knowledge of basic linguistic skills: Where does it come from? In S. Rosenfield & V. Berninger (Eds.), *Handbook on implementing evidence based academic interventions* (pp. 851–877). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moats, L. C., & Foorman, B. R. (2003). Measuring teachers' content knowledge of language and reading. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 53, 23–45.
- Smartt, S. M., & Reschly, D. J. (2007). *Barriers to the preparation of highly qualified teachers in reading*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2008). Response to intervention and teacher preparation. In E. Grigorenko (Ed.), *Educating individuals with disabilities: IDEA 2004 and beyond* (pp. 273–293). New York: Springer.
- Walsh, K., Glaser, D., & Wilcox, D. D. (2006). *What education schools aren't teaching about reading and what elementary teachers aren't learning*. Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality.

Note: IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards can be downloaded from our TCB website by going to the panel, "IDA National Info"