

August 2016 Message  
Essential Elements of Adolescent Literacy Programs  
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Children in the early grades (K-3) spend a great deal of time learning how to read. Instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary takes up the majority of their literacy instruction. With that foundation, reading to learn becomes a priority for adolescents in middle school and high school. But what programming elements should take priority for these students? Many DHH adolescents struggle to read because they did not master the “learning to read” skills in elementary school. How can teachers and schools design adolescent literacy programs that support DHH students’ need to continue learning to read while they are held responsible for reading to learn?

Reading to learn requires that students analyze, synthesize, and evaluate informational text from multiple sources, including textbooks, historical fiction and nonfiction, news stories, user manuals, and even job applications (Goldman, 2012). Researchers overwhelmingly support explicit instruction to support adolescent literacy development, particularly for struggling learners (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013). With explicit instruction, adolescent students have a better chance of meeting the standards than through alternate strategies, such as discovery-based learning. Schools and teachers should consider including the following areas to create an effective literacy program for DHH adolescents:

- **Word Study:** Word study includes strategies for word analysis, word recognition, and morphology (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013). For example, a word study lesson may include explicit instruction with commonly used prefixes such as *un-*, *non-*, and *dis-*. Word study can include breaking words into syllables, identify irregular words, learning root word meanings, and using a word’s structure for decoding.
- **Fluency:** Students read fluently when they are able to read a passage with proper expression both accurately and quickly (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). Students who read fluently spend more time understanding what they read instead of decoding. Repeated oral reading has been found to be the most effective way of improving fluency. With adolescent students, a literacy program that builds fluency skills should include frequently tracking student progress, providing students with feedback so they can self-monitor their progress, using passages with vocabulary that has been previously taught and that can be read independently, and increasing passage difficulty as fluency improves (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).
- **Vocabulary:** Vocabulary instruction focuses on understanding word meanings. When students understand the meanings of the words they read, they can improve their overall

reading comprehension. In addition to explicit instruction about word meanings using student-friendly definitions, vocabulary instruction in an adolescent literacy program should include strategies for independently learning unknown words such as using context clues and reference aids (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).

- **Comprehension:** The ability to understand and remember what one has read is arguably the most important aspect of reading. Reading comprehension is a complex process that involves the elements previously discussed in this message: word study, fluency, and vocabulary. Students should be taught strategies to use before, during, and after reading to gain complete understanding of a passage. These strategies should include activating prior knowledge, asking and generating questions, using graphic organizers and text structure, summarizing text, and monitoring one's own understanding of text and thinking through the use of metacognitive strategies (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).
- **Motivation:** Many struggling readers lack the motivation necessary to improve their reading skills (Boardman et al., 2008). It is difficult to explicitly teach motivation, but teachers can promote motivation by integrating it across each element mentioned above. Teachers can motivate students to improve reading by elevating self-efficacy, tapping into students' interests by integrating literacy across a variety of content areas, connecting literacy to personal experiences, and expanding student choices for reading (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).

## Resources

All About Adolescent Literacy: <http://www.adlit.org/>

Adolescent Literacy Toolkit:

[http://www.ccsso.org/resources/digital\\_resources/adolescent\\_literacy\\_toolkit.html](http://www.ccsso.org/resources/digital_resources/adolescent_literacy_toolkit.html)

NCTE Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform:

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/AdolLitPrinciples.pdf>

## References

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