

The Problem

We know that frequent, sustained, engaged reading:

- develops fluency, vocabulary, comprehension skills, and knowledge;
- correlates strongly to reading achievement at all levels, in diverse populations;
- is central to school achievement, and thus to life opportunities. (Krashen, 2011)

BUT, struggling readers

- (still) have little opportunity to read connected, authentic text in school;
 - Allington, 1977 – 43 words out of 30 minutes
 - Brenner et al., 2009 – 9 min. out of 90 minutes
- are unlikely to choose to read recreationally outside of school;
- typically cannot independently read the books that interest them;
- have often never experienced fluent, enjoyable reading of a self-chosen book.

I developed Apprenticeship Reading as a way for parents or other volunteer adults to fill this gap, and thus to help novice, struggling readers increase both their reading skills and their desire to read.

What is Apprentice Reading?

In Apprentice Reading, "an adult 'reading partner' reads reader-chosen books *together with* a novice/struggling reader, alternating lines or pages, helping with the decoding of difficult words, providing explanations of difficult passages, and in other ways modeling and scaffolding the reading experience so that the reader is able to accomplish the authentic task of reading a personally interesting book which would have been beyond his or her independent capabilities" (Knapp, 2003, p. 1). Essential elements of the intervention include:

- The child chooses whatever he/she wants to read!
- The child and adult take turns reading--lines, paragraphs, pages, even word-by-word, if necessary.
- During the child's turn, the adult (unobtrusively) scaffolds the child's reading.
- They discuss, question, wonder, and enjoy the reading.
- The focus stays on what they're reading, not how the child is reading.

Results

Eight small-N studies of Apprentice Reading completed over more than a decade of research have demonstrated its efficacy with struggling readers. These studies have focused on elementary students across a range of grade levels and have used a variety of adult volunteers who read with struggling readers in natural settings (schools or homes) for 20-30 minutes, two to four times a week for 10-12 weeks. Adult volunteers typically received an hour or two of initial training and some ongoing, though minimal, support such as a biweekly phone call from a librarian or other educator to answer questions, suggest books, and such.

Participants show significant increases in measured reading skills

Table 1: *Summary of eight studies, showing details of each intervention and participants' growth in reading (on following page)*

	STUDY	PARTICIPANTS	PARTNERS	TIMES/WK	DURATION	AV READING GROWTH
1	Knapp & Winsor, 1998	9 (gr 2 & 3)	PI & 2 GRAD STS	3	10 WKS	5.5 SS (KTEA)*
2	Knapp, 1998	6 (gr 2 & 3)	PARENTS	VARIABLE	10 WKS	1.7 SS (Woodcock-J)**
3	Knapp, 1998	16 (gr 2-5)	UG & G STS	4	9 WKS	.33 SS (Woodcock-J)
4	Knapp, 2003	9 (gr 4 & 5)	UG STS	4	12 WKS	8.3 MOS. (STAR)***
5	Knapp, 2003	12 (gr 4 & 5)	UG STS	4	12 WKS	7.3 MOS. (STAR)
6	Knapp, 2005	17 (gr 2-5)	UG STS	4	12 WKS	9.1 MOS. (TOWR -SW)
7	Foster & Knapp, 2013	18 (gr 3)	ADULT VOLS	2	12 WKS	9.1 MOS. (STAR)
8	Knapp, 2015/16	22 (gr 1-4)	PARENTS	VARIABLE	5-11 WKS	4.5 SS (KTEA)

* Significantly greater gain than matched controls at $p < .10$, $ES = .88$

** Significantly greater gain than matched controls at $p < .05$, $ES = 1.5$

*** Significantly greater gain than control group at $p < .005$, $ES = 1.3$

In the four studies that included fluency measures, participants showed parallel increases in reading fluency. Participants in Studies 1, 2 and 3 improved 46%, 65% and 23% respectively in number of CWPM read from curriculum-based text passages. Participants in Study 8 were tested using the DIBELS, and gained an average of 24.8 WPM in fluency between pre- and post-intervention administrations of the DIBELS, as a group exceeding the standardized expected gain of 18 WPM by 38%, and WPM gain was positively and moderately correlated ($r = .55$) to the number of sessions each student attended.

Participants show positive changes in home and school reading behaviors. Across studies, classroom teachers and parents repeatedly note changes such as the following:

Discussions with her reading partner have made a great deal of difference in how Glynda pays attention to what she reads and thinks about it. Her comprehension is vastly improved. (Glynda's teacher -all names are pseudonyms)

Instead of word-for-word, he's getting a little more flow, [and] if he doesn't understand it, he'll question it. (Jameel's father)

It used to be, at the end of last year, when she was reading a social studies book she wouldn't be able to do it, you know, the questions at the back of the chapter. Even if I would read it to her, you know, she couldn't get the questions. She'd cry, like, "Grandma, I just don't understand it!" . . . Now she comes home, goes into her room, and she does her homework, and she does it right. She's doing fine at it now! . . . She used to have a real hard time in school, [but] she hasn't any hard time now. (Kenisha's grandmother, emphasis in original)

Participants are more motivated to read and enjoy it more. This change in attitude is evidenced both at home and at school, by comments from parents and teachers such as

Billy made tremendous gains in enjoyment of reading this year. He was never willing to try reading a chapter book before, but has discovered a whole new world of possibilities and is getting ready to fly! (Billy's teacher)

Len's mother and grandmother came to school wanting to meet the reading mentor. They said that he had never had a good school year before, but was looking forward to coming to school this year for the first time. The tension he had shown when it was time to read was much less, and he was teaching them to read with him "the way [Ms. H] reads with me" and asking to read together. (Len's teacher)

The strangest thing happened last week! He just took a book and he's been reading it all week; he's been reading it to himself! (Chris's mother)

Participants begin to see themselves as members of the "Reading Club" (Smith, 1988). Again, this can be seen in reports from both parents and teachers such as

He is starting to show off a little because he is more comfortable with himself as a reader. He is also starting to choose books based on personal interest rather than just grabbing one when he goes to the library. (Kasey's teacher)

The difference in Debby's perception of herself, her role in the class, and her attitude about life in general is dramatic. Behavior problems that often were exhibited during reading time before are totally gone. (Debby's teacher)

Like I said, she started reading to her younger sister. So it's like, they take turns. It's like a thing around here; you know, once you get to read better, you [help] the next person. I mean she enjoys teaching her. (Yvonne's mother, emphasis in original)

Why It Works - Theoretical & Empirical Support

The intervention is based on a cognitive apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990), grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) theory that "higher psychological processes" such as reading develop from internalized language, arising first as dialogue between the learner and a more knowledgeable other, then becoming private speech, used by the learner to enhance and regulate behavior, and finally developing to the point of internal, inaudible language, or thought. The adult scaffolding allows the struggling reader to remain in Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development," the optimal "learning space" between what a child can already do by himself and what he can accomplish with the help of a more knowledgeable other. In addition:

- Scaffolding & turn-taking reduce cognitive load & performance anxiety & provide dual sensory input.
- The partner models good, engaged reading.
- The struggling reader succeeds in a personally chosen, meaningful task, increasing self-efficacy, locus of control, and growth mindset, and thus motivation.

The reader and partner develop a comfortable, rewarding relationship.

- The struggling reader reads a LOT MORE TEXT than s/he would or could have independently, thereby
 - increasing vocabulary and familiarity with the written register,
 - building fluency & automatized decoding,
 - developing knowledge of story grammars and expository forms, and
 - gaining background knowledge.

Conclusion

The Reading Apprenticeship intervention is not and was never intended to replace or supplant the type of focused professional instruction needed by all struggling readers. However, there are many more struggling readers in our elementary schools than can be served by reading specialists in time- and resource-intensive individual or small group intervention programs. Often, only the most severely disabled readers can continue to receive such services, while the many who have simply "fallen behind" tend to fall further behind each year, while losing interest in reading and any motivation to improve, due both to repeated reading failure and to their inability to access age-appropriate texts. Even those who are fortunate enough to get the extra instruction they need often have little time or inclination for recreational reading, which we know is essential to becoming a lifelong reader. While the small number of participants makes it difficult to support claims of success from any one of these studies, the pattern of success evidenced across these studies (all of which were implemented using minimally trained volunteers in natural settings, with no additional funding from the school or outside sources),

suggests that the Reading Apprenticeship intervention may be an effective and cost-effective way to help many struggling readers regain both skill and interest in reading.

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS)

Does this intervention require significant additional resources from schools or parents? No, only access to books, places to read and loose supervision from a librarian, reading specialist or interested teacher.

Does the adult partner have to be a good reader? I have no data on partner's reading skills, but I know some effective parent partners who were not high school graduates; partners do have to be able to read English

What if a child can't seem to find any books he wants to read, or seems uninterested in the books he chooses? This is common. Do a "library walk," based on what they like to do after school, their favorite TV shows, and hobbies, etc. Letting them choose and buy a book at a bookstore or Book Fair can also be very powerful.

What if children want to read books that are much too difficult, or conversely, too easy for them? That's OK. "Too hard" books aren't frustrating, due to adult scaffolding, and they get tired of "too easy" books pretty soon.

Why is there no phonics instruction in this intervention? Though there is usually a good bit of informal talk between partners about words and sounds, struggling readers already get lots of formal phonics instruction in classes; what they need is time to read. Also, it is much more difficult for relatively untrained volunteers to effectively deliver phonics instruction than it is for them to partner-read with children; this is an intervention that can be done in schools without heavy investment of professional resources, or even by parents themselves.

Does the Reading Apprenticeship intervention work for every struggling reader? No, 16 struggling readers out of the 107 in these studies showed little or no improvement (some of these had developmental disabilities), and only 5 did not come to enjoy reading with their partners.

If I want to start an Apprentice Reading program in my school or organization, or just at home, what should I do? Contact me at the email above; I am always happy to help parents, organizations and schools get started with Apprentice Reading!

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