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# Modernizing the Reading Clinic through Research and Exploration

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RUNNING HEAD: Modernizing the Reading Clinic

Modernizing the Reading Clinic through Research and Exploration

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### Abstract

With the increased emphasis on standardized testing from state and federal mandates, the need for reading remediation has intensified. Programs directed towards increasing student test scores have been put in place nationwide with mixed results. These initiatives include Response to Intervention (RTI), direct instruction, and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs); however, the focus remains on correcting students' problems, rather than on creating an environment in which success is not only attainable but also allows students to flourish. Imagine a place where students are motivated, intrigued, and eager to find what the teacher has planned for today. This is not fantasy; this place is known as a reading clinic. This paper aims to detail specifics of how to effectively structure and lead operations at a reading clinic at any grade level—from elementary school through college.

## Modernizing the Reading Clinic through Research and Exploration

### Why have reading clinics?

Research-based methods and strategies fill the current affairs of literature in the field of reading and literacy education. However, assembling structures within which these techniques can take shape remains a minimally researched field. Interest in reading clinics has fluctuated due to reasons that include financial cost and time considerations. Yet, the support system that reading clinics provide to all participants including the students, tutors, and clinicians is unlike any other.

Although school systems are increasing their focus on assessment, their assessment practices are not always geared towards acquiring data for instructional purposes. Implications of school-wide testing cannot always be taken into consideration during the school year because the results of end-of-the-year testing are not returned until months later, further increasing the gap between classroom instructional decisions and assessment data results. Delayed feedback often equates with unused data—the greatest tragedy of classroom and school-wide assessments.

Alvermann (2001) urges that “if academic literacy instruction is to be effective, it must address issues of self-efficacy and engagement” (p. 2). Reading clinics open the door to students who have lost a sense of satisfaction from reading, become frustrated, and burdened by the stigma of reading poorly in class. Independent readers are not built from having repeated negative experiences with literacy. No one would choose to do something that only brings disappointment. Instead of hoping and wishing for the best for struggling readers, particular components need to be in place so as to provide lasting and meaningful interactions with literature in reading clinics.

The International Reading Association (IRA) Adolescent Literacy Position Statement (1999) urged for instruction to include both skill development and motivation. Although this has become a common aim among educators, meeting both the need for skills instruction and reading motivation is difficult to achieve, especially when developing the abilities of those striving readers who may have negative impressions of reading and writing.

#### Necessary Components of a Reading Clinic

Whether in elementary, middle, and high school, or at the collegiate level, reading clinics should foster the abilities of students in various ways. By completing the eight-step process outlined below, educators can permit students to expand their abilities while minimizing obstacles towards success.

1. *Assessment data serve as the basis from which instructional goals are set.*

Stephens et al. (1995) found that “the salient relationship was not between assessment and instruction per se. Granted, the two were related, but their relationship was moderated by the decisionmaking model of the district” (p. 494). Indeed, these issues are deeply rooted within how schools are structured and how they operate on a daily basis. Reading clinics, on the other hand, are largely student-centered and every educational opportunity is individualized in nature without having to follow curriculums with which have already led towards unsuccessful results. Instructional planning heavily relies on assessment data that may include standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests, informal assessments, and student work samples (Mokhtari, Rosemary, & Edwards, 2007).

2. *Instructional plans are composed of research proven teaching strategies with practice opportunities for expounding.*

It must be clearly understood that research proven teaching strategies are of utmost importance as the foci within instruction (Farstrup & Samuels, 2002). For instance, if a second grade student struggles in oral reading comprehension, using selections from the following research proven strategies can provide an avenue for improvement:

1. *Prediction*—including activating prior knowledge, previewing, and overviewing (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Anderson, Wilkinson, Mason, & Shirey, 1987; Fielding, Anderson, & Pearson, 1990; McGinley & Denner, 1987; Neuman, 1988; Pearson & Johnson, 1983)
2. *Think aloud*—including teacher think alouds and student think alouds (Baumann, Seifert-Kessel, & Jones, 1992; Kucan & Beck, 1997; Silven & Vauras, 1992)
3. *Text structure*—understanding the organization of text to improve the recollection of events (Mandler, 1978; Pearson, 1981; Stein & Glenn, 1979)
4. *Visual representations of text*—visuals displays help remember countless words of text (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Gallagher & Pearson, 1989)
5. *Summarization*—a critical step towards understanding (Cunningham, 1982; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991)
6. *Questioning*—After a period of implementation, students begin to ask questions while they read and thus, read with a greater purpose. Questioning occurs before, during, and/or after reading; various levels of questions including explicit, implicit, and critical thinking (Anderson & Biddle, 1975;

Levin & Pressley, 1981; Pressey, 1926; Rickards, 1976; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996; Yopp, 1988).

3. *Teachers motivate students through Brozo and Flynt's (2008) six evidence-based principles:*

1. Elevating self-efficacy
2. Engendering interest in new learning
3. Connecting outside with inside school literacies
4. Making an abundance of interesting texts available
5. Expanding choices and options
6. Structuring collaboration for motivation

4. *Praise is given regularly for achievements made and not based on meeting grade level expectations.*

Every student will not become a perfect reader. With that said, students' achievements and improvements should be noted and acknowledged as progress is made. Donovan and Ellis (2005) state that "as you praise his or her interests and efforts, you will see and hear enthusiasm and success" (p. 175). Giving the simplest acts of praise are commonly forgotten, but almost always remembered by the receiver.

5. *The environment is both rigorous and nurturing.*

Rigor and nurture seem almost contradictory as they mold the very foundation from which education philosophies are derived; however, it is quintessential to develop a learning environment in which both flourish. Having rigor or nurture alone does not equate with providing opportunities for maximal growth and success.

6. *The teacher varies instructional strategies so as to maintain maximal attention and enthusiasm.*

A brief survey of students at any level of schooling would render the notion of boredom as one of the largest obstacles with which students struggle. Routines and frameworks for instruction are necessary; however, breaking the monotony of hackneyed instructional strategies, teacher-led activities, and independent learning opportunities is critical for maintaining students' focus and attention spans.

7. *Relative strengths and weaknesses must be recognized and considered within instruction.*

After assessing an elementary school student, one preservice teacher in my reading clinic commented, "Johnny does not have any strengths. He is behind grade level in word recognition, oral reading, and silent reading comprehension ability." Although he scores below his current level in school, it does not equate to having no strengths. His strengths, just as any other striving or advanced reader, are relative (Dunston, 2007). Thus, if Johnny is two levels behind in oral and silent reading comprehension, but only one level behind in word recognition, his recognition of words is his relative strength. Recognizing relative strengths is often forgotten in school settings where grade level benchmark accomplishments dominate instructional goals.

8. *Teachers carefully scaffold readers towards mastery of reading and writing, utilizing the gradual-release of responsibility method (GRR)*

Vygotsky's (1934/1978) notions of scaffolding and Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) GRR method are embedded within the core of any remedial reading program. Educators provide a supportive role towards readers who are learning new concepts and skills and

over time, slowly shifting the responsibility to the student for their own learning (Ellery, 2005).

### Specific Procedural Goals in Content Areas

Pressure to perform well on tests is on the minds of middle and high school as well as collegiate students and thus, test-taking skills should be explicitly taught during these years regardless of previous instruction. Having students think critically to resolve real-world problems is one example. Mr. Douglas, a tenth grade teacher at Harbrook County High School in Maryland, schedules foreign policy meetings, where his students research multiple countries and their political systems and agendas. His students come prepared to debate issues that affect each of their represented countries. Through conversation students learn about multiple perspectives, even though they researched only one country personally. Conducting lessons and projects like Mr. Douglas's foreign policy exchange of ideas allows students to gain novel understandings and expand upon information already embedded in their schemas.

Vocabulary instruction is another crucial component within the structure of high school and collegiate reading clinics. Specific techniques utilized within reading clinics include:

1. Having students identify difficult vocabulary within text, defining it using context, recording the page numbers, and checking those words versus the actual definition
2. Having students use Knowledge Rating Scales (Dale & O'Rourke, 1971) to assess their level of vocabulary knowledge prior to reading and postreading as well as their definitional and contextual level of understanding
3. Using the Frayer Model (1969) to prompt the student to analyze the concept (definition and characteristics) and then synthesize and apply their knowledge by thinking of examples and non-examples

4. Using semantic feature analysis to compare a series of words on a number of established characteristics
5. Creating cloze procedures for ‘vocabulary use’ practice
6. Teaching Greek and Latin word parts through morphemic analysis of multisyllabic words
7. Focusing on tier 2 words—those that occur irregularly, but students have already seen the words (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005)

Vocabulary instruction directly contributes to increases in comprehension. It is easier to understand this relationship by thinking about how the readability level of text becomes reduced as one gains knowledge of words and thus, the content makes sense to the reader. Although test-taking skills and vocabulary development are recommended foci, they contribute to a larger over-arching goal of comprehension or the understanding of information and its application.

#### Specific Procedural Goals for Postsecondary Education

In 2000, nearly 2.4 million freshmen entered degree-granting postsecondary institutions (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2001). Only 51% of students who graduated from high school in 2005 met the college readiness in reading comprehension (ACT, 2005). Moreover, 11% of entering freshmen in 2000 enrolled in postsecondary education remedial reading courses (NCES, 2003a). While several definitions exist, the NCES (2003b) studies label postsecondary remedial education as “courses in reading for college-level students lacking those skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution” (p. 1). Grimes (1997) conducted a study on the characteristics, persistence, and academic success of underprepared college students and found that, as a whole, the group demonstrated lower course

completion, greater attrition, and more text anxiety than those determined to be college-ready students.

Amey and Long (1998) also indicated that the institution played a role in student success. For example, institutions whose students fared well mandated reading assessment and reading placement for their students as well as the successful completion of reading remediation prior to continued enrollment. Hock and Mellard (2005) suggested that interventions researched and found effective with younger students can be appropriate for students entering a postsecondary setting.

Explicit instruction must be provided in which comprehension strategies are clearly modeled. Students are guided as they learn to utilize the strategy. Extensive practice should be provided until the strategy can be applied independently. Various strategies include:

1. *Anticipation/Reaction Guides*, first developed by Herber (1978)—enhances comprehension when students make predictions about concepts based on what they know and believe, and then having these predictions confirmed or altered based on what they learn from the reading.
2. *Self-Monitoring Approach to Reading and Thinking (SMART)* (Vaughn & Estes, 1986) —consists of a four-step strategy that helps students identify what they do and do not understand while they are reading.
3. *Concept Maps*—a visual representation of a body of knowledge including the critical concepts, vocabulary, ideas, events, generalizations, and facts. Students are able to understand the interrelationships of concepts presented.
4. *Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)* (Klingner, Vaughn, Dimino, Schumm, & Bryant, 2001)—infuses metacognitive strategies into explicit strategy instruction

based on the foundations of reciprocal teaching and features previously identified with effective instruction before, during, and after reading.

### Conclusion

Reading clinical programs are an effective means to improve the skills and abilities of students of all ages, but only if they are structured in ways that promote active engagement, practice opportunities, research-based learning, and motivation for literacy empowerment. Using proven methods directed towards students' needs, derived from assessment data, in areas like phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, will ultimately lead students to have more successful experiences in every subject area. Regardless of the level of education, reading clinics should no longer be viewed as superfluous but instead as integral components of reading success.

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