CHAPTER 2

Struggling Adolescent Readers

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Susan Lenski

Far too many students struggle with reading in middle schools and high schools. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), more than 6 of every 10 adolescents in the United States cannot read grade-level texts proficiently (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Clearly, adolescent reading achievement is a problem.

At the same time that the number of struggling adolescent readers has been increasing, public attention has been captured by teachers who seemingly accomplish the impossible with low-achieving students. A fifth-grade teacher in a high-poverty area inspires his students to perform Shakespeare and writes about his successes in *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire*. *The New York Times* writes, "Rafe Esquith is a genius and a saint. The American education system would do well to imitate him" (Esquith, 2007, back cover). High school underachievers find their voices by writing about their lives. They take the show on the road and have a movie made about their efforts (The Freedom Writers & Gruwell, 1999). These situations are true, but they are also extraordinary. Reality for most teachers is far different.

In a typical school, at least half of the students have trouble reading, although numbers vary greatly by school, district, and state. In some states, for instance, just over half of the students can be classified as struggling readers. In other states, more than 75% of students need help with reading

(Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). In most classrooms and in most schools the majority of students cannot read the textbooks teachers assign, cannot complete their homework without assistance, and do not read for pleasure.

Can anything be done for struggling adolescent readers? The future appears to be brightening, and the days of ignoring struggling readers are in the past. Before examining the possibilities, though, it is important to understand the severity of the problem. This chapter describes the problem of adolescent reading by providing information about student achievement from a national perspective and then explains some of the root causes for the enormous numbers of struggling readers in middle and high schools. This explanation is followed by a discussion of frameworks for adolescent literacy that have been developed in the past decade. The changes in classroom instruction that show promise of making a difference for struggling readers are then presented. The chapter concludes by making the case that changing the lives of struggling adolescent readers cannot be accomplished on a wide-scale basis without careful attention and systemic change. Concrete examples to invigorate secondary literacy programs, improve classroom instruction, and increase the achievement of struggling adolescent readers are detailed in other chapters of this book.

What Is a "Struggling Adolescent Reader"?

Students who have difficulty reading in schools are often labeled "struggling readers." The term *struggling readers* is an artifact of schooling and can be defined as students who have experienced difficulty with school-based reading (Franzak, 2006). It is important to note that struggling readers have difficulty with *school* reading. The values of school are embedded within the term. Franzak writes, "Because marginalized adolescents are initially identified as such within the school context, the underlying structure and values of school literacy are built into the definitions of struggling readers" (p. 219). An adolescent labeled a struggling reader in school may not necessarily have the same sort of reading problems when reading outside of school. As Dressman and his colleagues (2006) learned when conducting case studies of adolescents' reading identities, some "so-called struggling readers, when given the opportunity, can find their own reasons for becoming literate, reasons that go beyond reading to acquire school knowledge of academically sanctioned texts" (p. 150). For the purposes of this book, however, we discuss struggling readers in the context of their achievement with academic reading, while at the same time recognizing that many students are able to read out-of-school texts proficiently.

Adolescent literacy experts have used a variety or terms to label students who have trouble reading. When students are younger, for example,

they are considered "at risk" for school failure, a term derived from the U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The term *at risk* was borrowed from the insurance industry to describe students who have a high probability of becoming a "loss" with respect to school success (Mueller, 2001). The term *at risk* does not seem to fit secondary students who are at risk of failure; they are already exhibiting low achievement. Other terms that have been used for middle and high school students who have difficulty reading are *aliterate*, *alienated*, *marginalized*, *reluctant*, and *resistant* (Lenters, 2006). Mueller (2001), who studied struggling readers in her classroom, calls them "lifers" as a way of portraying students who have had problems in reading for most of their lives. In this book, however, we have chosen to call students who have difficulty reading in school *struggling readers*.

How Many Adolescents Are Struggling Readers?

One of the best overall measures of reading in the United States is the NAEP. The NAEP is a nationally representative assessment of what students in grades 4, 8, and 12 know and can do in various subject areas, including reading. Scores are categorized as Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. According to the NAEP policy definitions, the Basic level represents a partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work. The Proficient level represents solid academic performance, and the Advanced level represents superior performance (*www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard*).

The majority of today's middle and high school students cannot read at the Proficient level. According to 2005 NAEP data, 29% of the nation's eighth graders scored below Basic and another 42% scored at the Basic level (Perie et al., 2005). Only 29% of the eighth graders scored at the Proficient and Advanced levels. (See Figure 2.1.) Using the information on scoring as a gauge, that means that up to 71% of eighth-grade students may be considered struggling readers, because students scoring at the Basic level can read grade appropriate texts but are unable to read them with the depth considered necessary for academic learning.

	Below basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
8th grade	29	42	26	3
12th grade	27	38	30	5

FIGURE 2.1. 2005 NAEP reading scores: Percentages by grade level. Data from U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcart/*.

The number of students who can be considered struggling readers at twelfth grade is almost as large. According to the 2005 data, 27% of twelfth graders read below Basic, 38% scored at Basic, 30% scored at the Proficient level, and 5% scored at the Advanced level. That means that 65% of the students who reach twelfth grade cannot read well enough to be considered Proficient readers. On the basis of these scores, it appears that more students at twelfth grade read better than do eighth-grade students. That is not necessarily true. The NAEP data at the twelfth-grade level may not accurately reflect the number of students who are struggling readers in high school because they do not include those students who have left the system. More than 3,000 students drop out of high school every day (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). It is highly likely that the majority of students who do not graduate from high school read at or below the Basic level. Therefore, it is probably more realistic to consider the number of struggling readers in high school to be higher than 65%.

Why Are There So Many Struggling Readers?

There are a number of reasons why so many middle and high school students struggle with reading. If we think about the students of one eighth-grade teacher in a school with the demographics of the NAEP data just cited, this is what we would find. Ms. Mohr teaches at Normal Township Middle School. She teaches a total of 150 different students in three language arts and two social studies classes. According to the national averages, 105 of these students would be able to read the textbooks with only superficial comprehension. Ms. Mohr would have 91 white, 24 black, 24 Hispanic, 9 Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 Native American/Alaskan Native students. Of the 150 students, 54 would be poor enough to qualify for free/reduced-price lunches. Students would also bring to the classroom their different sociocultural backgrounds, prior experiences with learning, and differing abilities.

There would be a variety of different reasons why the 105 struggling readers in Ms. Mohr's classes have difficulty reading. Some of the students would come from backgrounds not consistent with the school culture or would speak languages other than English. Some would exhibit identified learning problems and may have attended special education or remedial reading classes during their elementary school years. Other struggling readers may have simply been unlucky and had teachers who did not know how to teach reading effectively. Some struggling readers in eighth grade may have done well in elementary school, but when faced with more complex academic texts, began having difficulty in reading. Many of Ms. Mohr's struggling readers may have simply lost their motivation to learn upon reaching early adolescence, and some may have "slipped through the

cracks." Each of the reasons that explain why the students failed to learn to read are discussed in the section that follows.

Students from Diverse Backgrounds

In some areas of the United States, middle and high schools have many students from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and languages. Ms. Mohr has 59 students from diverse backgrounds; some teachers have classes in which almost all of their students do not know English. Ms. Mohr speaks some Spanish, which helps her relate to the Spanish-speaking students and parents, but she also has students who speak Russian, Hmong, Arabic, Samoli, Japanese, and Chinese. Ms. Mohr is currently learning the basic words in each language, but because they have different alphabets, she is not making much progress.

Ms. Mohr's makeup of students from diverse backgrounds is typical of eighth grade, but high schools tend to have more English language learners (ELLs) than do elementary schools. Many families wait to emigrate until their youngest children are in school and their oldest children are out of elementary school (Igoa, 1995). A great many students who are learning to speak English also struggle with reading grade-level material. This makes sense. If a student is not proficient in a language, it is extremely difficult to read academic texts that are written at middle and high school levels. In addition, many teachers assume that students will not be able to comprehend academic ideas until they are fluent in English (García & Pearson, 1991). Many secondary teachers, therefore, instruct ELLs only on low-level reading strategies such as accessing background knowledge and rereading (Padrón, 1998). Although these strategies are valuable, ELLs also need to learn more advanced reading and thinking strategies in order to make accelerated gains in reading (Lenski & Ehlers-Zavala, 2004).

Students with Special Learning Needs

Ms. Mohr has 20 students who were identified as learning disabled in elementary school and have received instruction in special education classes. Some of these students have been in special education classes for 6 years, yet they still have difficulty in reading. Although the students have been given extra reading instruction, remedial reading classes have typically not been successful (Allington, 2002). Some researchers theorize that students who have spent years in remedial classes have spent a great deal of time learning reading skills, yet have not spent enough time reading connected texts, possibly because students in special education classes have not spent much time actually reading (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Kennedy, Birman, & Demaline, 1986) and instruction was focused on acquiring decontextualized reading skills rather than building comprehension (Ivey &

Fisher, 2006). The instruction in remedial reading classes in which students have spent many years is often somewhat limited to the teaching of literal recall and skills that do not promote students' learning how to become strategic readers. This kind of instruction has been tied to slowing rather than accelerating reading progress (Johnston & Allington, 1991). As a result, students who have learning disabilities do not do well in secondary schools, as compared with their peers without disabilities (Fisher, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002).

Prior Instruction in Reading

Another reason for the large number of struggling adolescent readers is that they have not had reading and writing strategies demonstrated effectively (Cambourne, 2001), and this is the case for several of Ms. Mohr's students. Some teachers are simply better than others at teaching reading. In a study concerning effective language arts teachers, Langer (2002, 2004) found that student achievement was higher when teachers used a combination of explicit and applied instruction, even in schools in which the rate of poverty was high. Other teachers may be effective as elementary teachers, but they do not know what strategies to use when teaching academic texts (Spor & Schneider, 1999). Some teachers have the mistaken belief that students learn to read in the primary grades and then they read to learn. This notion comes from the work of Jeanne Chall (1983), who outlined developmental stages of reading. Recent educational thought, however, has suggested that adolescent readers are "learning to read to learn" (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). The truth is that as students progress through the grades, they encounter more complex texts with higher reading levels. These readers must be given the skills and strategies needed to comprehend and analyze these more complex texts through explicit instruction.

Text Difficulty

Some struggling adolescent readers are able to read grade-level material in elementary school, but by middle school find academic reading difficult (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). This is true for several students in Ms. Mohr's classes, who exhibited no problem with reading in fourth and fifth grades, but by sixth grade, began having problems reading texts. This is not surprising, because as Snow and Biancarosa (2003) point out, "As content demands increase, literacy demands also increase: students are expected to read and write across a wide variety of disciplines, genres, and materials with increasing skill, flexibility, and insight" (p. 5). Middle and high school students are expected to read texts that have heavy concept loads and much technical vocabulary about topics that are new to the students. Students not only must read these difficult texts with comprehension for initial

understanding, but must also be able to think about meaning in such a way as to make inferences, draw conclusions, and acquire new learning (Torgesen et al., 2007). Yet too few students have experiences reading expository texts at this level, because elementary teachers spend much more time teaching fictional stories than teaching students how to read informational texts (Duke, 2000).

In some classes teachers also initiate students into the ways of reading and thinking in the various disciplines; they teach students to read like scientists, historians, and poets (Franzak, 2006). This type of thinking requires students to have a deep understanding of both the texts and the traditions of the different disciplines. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2006), "To meet the performance standards across content areas, students need to transact meaning from disciplines that have unique organizational structures and concepts. Students are expected to locate and paraphrase information found in lengthy, complex passages in texts dealing with literature, social studies, science, and math" (p. 12). Students who are not able to read materials of this complexity have trouble succeeding in secondary schools.

Motivation to Read

Lack of motivation to read is one of the most frequent contributors to a struggling reader's lack of achievement. Many of Ms. Mohr's students, especially the boys, began to lose interest in reading when they reached middle school (see Brozo, 2002). According to Pitcher and her colleagues (2007), "Motivation to read is a complex construct that influences readers' choices of reading material, their willingness to engage in reading, and thus their ultimate competence in reading, especially related to academic reading tasks" (p. 379). Motivation is often linked to students' self-efficacy, or their belief in their own ability (Bandura, 1986). According to a research study conducted by Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch, and Murphy (2007), when learning goals and self-efficacy are encouraged to grow, interest in learning and achievement is more likely.

Students with little motivation to read are often disengaged from learning and avoid reading (Beers, 2003). Because these students do not spend time reading, their progress tends to be slower than that of students who do read (Stanovich, 1986). The act of avoiding reading sets the stage for further reading failure, which can result in learned helplessness (Johnston & Winograd, 1985). Learned helplessness occurs when students believe that nothing they can do will help them improve their learning. In the case of adolescents, their past failures in reading have taught them that they cannot succeed no matter how hard they try. Therefore, they lose the motivation to try to read difficult texts. Learned helplessness often occurs when students have entered a negative spiral: They attribute success to luck

and failure to themselves; they feel inferior, have low self-esteem and decreased motivation, and eventually feel helpless. Students from diverse minority groups can be especially susceptible to feelings of learned helplessness (Berk, 2001).

The Effects of Poverty

An additional reason for the large number of struggling adolescent readers is that at least one-half of the students in the nation have lived at or near the poverty level by the time they are 15 years old (Taylor, 1996). This means that for Ms. Mohr's 150 students, 75 of them have lived in poverty at some point in their lives, and 54 of them currently are considered poor. The challenges of poverty for these 54 students can prevent many of them from learning to their full capabilities. Some students are homeless—living in shelters, in cars, with relatives, or on the streets. Other students work in part-time jobs that keep them from studying and participating in school events. Still other students have to miss school in order to take care of family members or to act as translators for parents. These and other social factors that go with living in poverty influence students' academic progress (Nichols & Good, 2004).

A Culture of Neglect

What happens to the 105 of Ms. Mohr's students who have difficulty in reading in eighth grade? Even though Ms. Mohr is an excellent teacher who truly cares about her students, some "slip through the cracks." In *The Road to Whatever: Middle-Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence*, Currie (2004) writes, "We live in a culture that makes it all too easy for adolescents to define themselves as failures, losers, fundamentally flawed, especially those who do not 'fit' well in their families, schools, and communities—who are out of sync with our dominant conceptions of what adolescents *should* be" (p. 39). He suggests that the United States' culture encourages an inversion of responsibility—adolescents are responsible for their own well-being without adult help. His theory is that the current culture in society and in schools does not allow adolescents to make mistakes without paying a stiff penalty. Currie describes the experiences of students who were often enthusiastic about entering high school, but once they were there and found that their strengths were ignored and any acts of rebellion were magnified, they stopped trying. He describes schools as organizations that classify students according to how well they meet, or do not meet, conventional standards of performance. For students who do not fit the norm, schools do not actively seek to build capacity. In some cases, then, the current structure of schooling does little to nurture struggling adolescent readers.

Policy Documents That Impact Struggling Readers

Struggling adolescent readers have been given increasing amounts of visibility over the past decade. The difficulties that struggling readers face have been recognized, but solutions to their problems are complex. There are indeed no "quick fixes" for struggling readers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). The hard work of determining how adolescents can achieve higher literacy levels has been the focus of two important organizations: the International Reading Association (IRA) and the Alliance for Excellent Education. Two policy documents and a recent book have been published that have laid the foundation for methods, programs, and initiatives that address the needs of struggling readers and have been the impetus for a renewed emphasis on adolescent literacy.

IRA Position on Adolescent Literacy

In 1997, the IRA brought together adolescent literacy experts to form a Commission on Adolescent Literacy. The Commission developed a position statement delineating what adolescents "deserve" in order to become literate adults (see Figure 2.2). Among its recommendations, the Commission wrote that adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and the desire to read increasingly complex material, that adolescents need well-developed repertoires of reading comprehension strategies, and that adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension across the curriculum (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). The Commission on Adolescent Literacy was at the forefront of making visible the needs of readers in secondary schools by outlining what *should be occurring in middle and high schools*.

Principled Practices

The IRA Commission continued its work by convening a group of adolescent literacy educators, who reviewed the research on adolescent literacy, expert opinions, and observations of highly regarded teachers. The result of this examination is a framework for instruction and policy that details what Sturtevant and her colleagues (2006) have called principled practices. Principled practices are concepts the authors adapted from Smagorinsky's (2002) work. The result is a framework including eight practices that the authors believe should be used for designing adolescent literacy programs. Figure 2.3 lists the eight principled practices.

1. Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read.
2. Adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials.
3. Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers.
4. Adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in teaching comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum.
5. Adolescents deserve reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning how to read.
6. Adolescents deserve teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics.
7. Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed.

FIGURE 2.2. Position statement from the International Reading Association. From Moore, D. W., Bean, T. W., Birdyshaw, D., & Rycik, J. A. (1999). Adolescent literacy: A position statement. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *43*(1), 97–112. Reprinted with permission of the International Reading Association.

Principles related to contexts for learning:
1. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in active learning environments that offer clear and facilitative literacy instruction.
2. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in respectful environments characterized by high expectations, trust, and care.

Principles related to instructional practices:
3. Adolescents need opportunities to engage with print and nonprint texts for a variety of purposes.
4. Adolescents need opportunities to generate and express rich understanding of ideas and concepts.
5. Adolescents need opportunities to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and learning.
6. Adolescents need opportunities to assess their literacy and learning competencies and direct their future growth.

Principles related to connections between literacy in and out of school:
7. Adolescents need opportunities to connect reading with their lives and their learning inside and outside of school.
8. Adolescents need opportunities to develop critical perspectives toward what they read, view, and hear.

FIGURE 2.3. Principled practices for adolescent literacy. Reprinted with permission from Sturtevant, E. G., Boyd, F. B., Brozo, W. G., Hinchman, K. A., Moore, D. A., & Alvermann, D. E. (2006). *Principled practices for adolescent literacy: A framework for adolescent literacy.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Reading Next

The Alliance for Excellent Education viewed adolescent literacy from a different perspective and reported its recommendations in *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancrosa & Snow, 2004). This report makes suggestions for middle and high school educators that fall into two main topics with several subtopics. The first topic is instructional improvements, and it includes the subtopics of direct, explicit comprehension instruction; effective instructional principles embedded in content; motivation and self-directed learning; and ongoing formative assessment of students. The second main topic is infrastructure improvements, which includes such ideas as extended time for literacy, program evaluation, leadership, and a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program. (See Figure 2.4.) Implementing all 15 of these recommendations can overwhelm school personnel, but Biancarosa and Snow (2004) state that implementing only a few of the principles will probably not lead to much improvement. Instead, they recommend that educators use the combination of principles that best fits their situation as the foundation for improvement in literacy.

Changing Perspectives about Classroom Instruction and School Programs

Policy documents that address literacy in middle and high school have been instrumental in changing the direction of adolescent literacy. Most important, experts have emphasized the need for the continued instruction of literacy at the secondary level (Moje, Young, Readance, & Moore, 2000). Currently, three perspectives about classroom instruction and school programs could result in a major shift regarding struggling adolescent readers. First, there is a renewed interest in students as individuals. This perspective sets the stage for new types of assessments and instruction for secondary students. A second change is in how literacy is embedded in the disciplines. The decades of content area reading instruction have not been successful, and a different way of using literacy in the disciplines has been conceptualized. Third, intervention programs for struggling adolescent readers are being developed and examined to reach those students who read far below grade level.

A Renewed Focus on Individual Students

Each of Ms. Mohr's 150 students has his or her own personality, learning background, interests, dreams, and fears. What cannot be captured in these words are the very personal dimensions of teaching. In their work with

Instructional Improvements

1. **Direct, explicit comprehension instruction,** which is instruction in the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read, including summarizing, keeping track of one's own understanding, and a host of other practices.
2. **Effective instructional principles embedded in content,** including language arts teachers using content-area texts and content-area teachers providing instruction and practice in reading and writing skills specific to their subject areas.
3. **Motivation and self-directed learning,** which includes building motivation to read and learn and providing students with the instruction and supports needed for independent learning tasks they will face after graduation.
4. **Text-based collaborative learning,** which involves students interacting with one another around a variety of texts.
5. **Strategic tutoring,** which provides students with intense individualized reading, writing, and content instruction as needed.
6. **Diverse texts,** which are texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics.
7. **Intensive writing,** including instruction connected to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform well into high school and beyond.
8. **A technology component,** which includes technology as a tool for and a topic of literacy instruction.
9. **Ongoing formative assessment of students,** which is informal, often daily assessment of how students are progressing under current instructional practices.

Infrastructure Improvements

10. **Extended time for literacy,** which includes approximately 2–4 hours of literary instruction and practice that takes place in language areas and content-area classes.
11. **Professional development** that is both long-term and ongoing.
12. **Ongoing summative assessment** of students and programs, which is more formal and provides data that are reported for accountability and research purposes.
13. **Teacher teams,** which are interdisciplinary teams that meet regularly to discuss students and align instruction.
14. **Leadership,** which can come from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students present in schools.
15. **A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program,** which is interdisciplinary and interdepartmental and may even coordinate with out-of-school organizations and the local community.

FIGURE 2.4. Reading next principles. Reprinted with permission from Biancarosa, G., & Snow, C. (2004). *Reading Next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy.* Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

struggling adolescent readers, Jackson and Cooper (2007) found that building relationships with students and honoring them as individuals play a crucial role in students' achievement. Many teachers agree with this viewpoint. In a study of 386 high school teachers, 90% of the teachers believed that addressing academic differences was important (Hoostein, 1998, cited in Tomlinson, 2004).

The trend is toward focusing on students as individuals; such a focus is vitally important when developing instruction for struggling readers. According to Tomlinson (2004), the one-size-fits-all classrooms of the past have failed many students. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ms. Mohr's classroom has 105 struggling readers, but each of these students has difficulty reading for one or more different reasons. Many students have trouble with the skill of reading and need an intervention program. Many others are resistant readers, students who are not interested in school reading (Lenters, 2006). Students who resist reading and do not read in middle school can fall behind to such an extent that they cannot read high school texts (Bintz, 1993). Still other students are interested in popular culture or are facile with the literacies of technology and can be reached through nonprint reading (Alvermann & Rush, 2004).

There are many reasons why students struggle with reading, and when teachers look at students as individuals, they can more easily determine what can reach the students. Instruction for all students, but especially for struggling readers, should identify students' needs and interests, tailor instruction to their needs, teach skills in the context of authentic texts, and provide opportunities for choice (Primeaux, 2000). In later chapters of this book, many approaches are suggested for struggling readers. It is up to the wise teacher to determine which idea, strategy, or approach meets the needs of the students rather than assuming that all adolescents who struggle with reading need a single approach.

A Changing Perspective on Reading in the Disciplines

Ms. Mohr is like many of her colleagues; she has an undergraduate degree in English, a minor in social studies, and a certificate to teach English and social studies for grades 6–12. During her teaching training, she had one class devoted to teaching reading, in which she heard the mantra, "Every teacher is a teacher of reading." This confused Ms. Mohr. What she knew best were the subjects of English and social studies; she really did not see herself as a teacher of reading. When she began graduate school, however, Ms. Mohr learned how to embed reading and learning strategies in her instruction, and that made perfect sense to her.

The example of Ms. Mohr illustrates how the role of middle and high school teachers is beginning to change with respect to teaching reading.

The well-known saying,"Every teacher a teacher of reading" was coined by William S. Gray in 1937 and has been a popular foundational belief in content-area reading for decades. Recently, however, educators have begun to describe the role of middle and high school teachers in different ways. Shanahan (2004) writes, "Let's avoid the fatuous rhetoric that 'all teachers are teachers of reading' " (p. 44). He goes on to say that content teachers must be committed to teaching their subject matter and that each discipline has its own specialized reading demands.

Torgesen and his colleagues (2007) wrote, "Our current understanding of reading growth indicates that students must continue to learn many new things, and acquire many additional skills, in order to maintain reading proficiency as they move from elementary to middle and high school. If they do not acquire the new skills specific to reading after the initial period of learning to read, they will not leave high school as proficient readers" (p. 4). In a recent study on effective adolescent literacy teachers, Paris and Block (2007) found that teachers who were deemed effective by their administrators and peers were able to embed literacy in their teaching by using critical thinking skills, asking questions, and allowing students to become independent learners. These teachers use reading and learning strategies to help students learn their content, and thus students experience using reading to make sense of complex and varied texts. Lenski, Johns, Wham, and Caskey (2007) suggest that content-area teachers can use reading as one way to help students learn content, but that reading is only one of the many different tools students need to learn.

A Renewed Emphasis on Intervention Programs

Many of Ms. Mohr's eighth-grade students can read only materials written at a third-grade reading level. Using the previously cited NAEP data, we know that 44 of Ms. Mohr's 150 students could benefit from a targeted intervention program. Although all of Ms. Mohr's students can benefit from curriculum-embedded instruction, some students also need to accelerate their reading progress. Additional instruction is necessary for these students to catch up to their peers. According to Shanahan (2004), struggling readers may need 10 additional hours per week in instruction in the foundational components of reading, such as fluency, word knowledge, and comprehension. These intervention programs can be delivered as after-school programs, elective reading classes during the school day, summer academies, weekend seminars, and so on.

There is no agreement in the field about the best intervention models for struggling readers. Snow and Biancarosa (2003) describe 12 of the programs that have the "pedagogically sound approach of scaffolding child learning by providing and gradually withdrawing support to encourage

eventual mastery of a taught strategy or skill" (p. 12). Among the programs they describe are the following:

- Short-term, intensive approaches that focus on decoding, fluency, and vocabulary (Boys Town Reading Curriculum)
- Approaches that address literacy needs in the academic disciplines (Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction, Guided Inquiry Supporting Multiple Literacies, Reading Apprenticeship)
- Approaches that focus on students' questioning during reading (Collaborative Reasoning, Reciprocal Teaching, Questioning the Author)
- Computer-assisted reading workshop programs (READ 180)
- Curricular frameworks (Scaffolded Reading Experience)
- Strategy instruction (Strategic Instruction Model, Transactional Strategies Instruction)

Striving Readers Program

The intervention programs for secondary students need more research to determine in what ways they can really make a difference in students' literacy. In response to this need, the U.S. Department of Education created the Striving Readers Program to investigate the programs that work best with middle and high school students who read below grade level. According to its description, "Striving Readers supports the implementation and evaluation of research-based interventions for struggling middle and high school readers in Title I eligible schools that are at risk of not meeting or are not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act, or that have significant percentages or numbers of students reading below grade level, or both" (*www.ed.gov/programs/ strivingreaders/index.html*). The goals of the Striving Readers program as described at the website are to:

- Raise student achievement in middle and high schools by improving the literacy skills of struggling adolescent readers, and
- Help build a strong, scientific research base around specific strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills.

Eight Striving Readers awards were given in 2005/2006, each with the following key components: (1) supplemental literacy interventions targeted to students who are reading significantly below grade level, (2) cross-disciplinary strategies for improving students' literacy, which may include professional development for subject matter teachers and use of research-based reading and comprehension strategies in classrooms across subject

areas, and (3) a strong experimental evaluation component. For example, Portland Public Schools (PPS) in Oregon was one of the eight school districts to receive a Striving Readers grant in 2005/2006. PPS's project provides research-based and targeted interventions to more than 1,700 struggling readers in grades 6–10 and schoolwide strategies for embedding literacy in all content areas to more than 6,000 students. Portland is partnering with the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning to implement the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM), with Portland State University for literacy professional development, and with RMC Research to conduct an independent and experimental evaluation of the Striving Readers project.

At the time of the publication of this book, all of the initial Striving Readers projects were in the midst of their 5-year awards, so no results from the projects have yet been reported. Locations of other funded Striving Readers projects and updates on programs and grant awards can be found at *www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/index.html*.

Guidelines for Selecting Intervention Programs

Because there are such a wide variety of intervention programs for struggling adolescent readers, school personnel may have difficulty in selecting the program that best fits their students. Information from Striving Readers projects will eventually provide relevant data to guide educators in making these decisions. However, school personnel also need to look at intervention programs from a wider perspective and to make sure the intervention program they select fits their purposes. As educators consider which intervention is best, they should consider the following questions:

- What are our overarching beliefs about literacy?
- What are the primary literacy needs of the majority of struggling readers (i.e., motivation, decoding, and so on)? What data did we use to arrive at these decisions?
- How are students currently being assessed in literacy? Do the scores accurately reflect students' literacy needs? Do we need more information, such as provided by diagnostic tests? How are assessment data already informing instruction?
- How does the intervention program supplement current classroom instruction in literacy? Is the current intervention program engaging for students?
- How will this intervention make a difference in students' overall literacy progress? How will the intervention program help students become more successful in their academic classes?
- Does the school or district have personnel who are knowledgeable about literacy instruction and can supervise the program?

As school personnel answer these critical questions, they must also remember that intervention programs need to be a supplemental part of an overall school literacy strategy that provides students with significant opportunities to read and that has literacy instruction embedded in academic classes (Allington, 2007). According to Fisher and Ivey (2006), "Without these two nonnegotiable features of the learning environment— access to high-quality, readable texts and instruction in strategies to read and write across the school day—it is doubtful that a specific, limited intervention will make much of a difference" (p. 181). Intervention programs alone will not address the needs of struggling middle and high school readers.

Conclusions

Although individual teachers can inspire their students to great achievements, the needs of the nation's huge number of struggling adolescent readers call for systemic change. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2006), "Low levels of adolescent literacy is not a problem that can be solved in isolation with some extra tutoring or supplemental programs for those unable to read well—it will take a concerted statewide policy and program effort that reaches deep into districts and the instructional practices of teachers across the curriculum" (p. 17). Change must occur at the classroom level, as well as at the school, district, and state levels.

As policy and program changes slowly make their way into classrooms, Ms. Mohr is still faced with 105 students who cannot read well enough to comprehend the texts she uses in her classroom. To address the needs of her struggling readers, Ms. Mohr needs to remember that although counting on miracles is seductive, they don't just happen. She can, however, take two actions that can make a difference. Ms. Mohr can begin to incorporate the new perspectives of adolescent literacy that were outlined in this chapter so that she updates her philosophy of teaching struggling readers, and she can immediately try some of the practical ideas described in the following chapters of this book. It is only through both a change in perspective and a change in practice that Ms. Mohr can make a sustained difference in the lives of the struggling readers in her classroom.

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