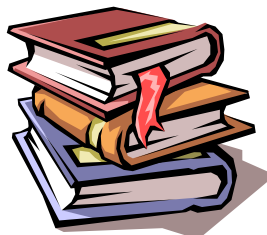


*Effective Strategies to  
Address the Needs of  
Adolescents 13+  
Experiencing Difficulties  
with Reading:  
A Review of the Literature*



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*It is not enough to simply teach  
children to read;  
we have to give them something worth  
reading..  
Something that will stretch their  
imaginations-  
something that will help them make  
sense of their own lives and  
encourage them to reach out toward  
people whose lives are quite  
different from their own.*

*~ Katherine Paterson ~*

*"Read in order to live."*  
Gustave Flaubert

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## Introduction

*“There is an urgent need for thoughtful and persistent interventions for those students who reach high school without the necessary reading skills.”*

*(Fischer, 1999/2000: 326)*

There has been a substantial body of research over the past decade focusing on the needs, interests, and capacities of adolescents who experience difficulties with the literacy demands of the secondary school curriculum. While there are no clear statistical data on the number of 13+ students who experience difficulties specifically with reading, a number of recent surveys have posited a range of up to 10% or greater of adolescents who, for a variety of reasons, “struggle” with reading in formal and informal educational and other contexts. Indeed, some studies put forward figures of up to 25% of adolescents who experience difficulties with reading, although such studies do not adequately distinguish between children and adolescents, nor between schools or within cognitive learning areas in the curriculum. (Prior, 1996; Rivalland and House, 2000).

There is consensus in the literature, however, that a student’s level of accomplishment in reading directly influences the quality and nature of his or her entire school and post-school life: “The consequences of a slow start in reading

become monumental as they accumulate exponentially over time” (Torgensen, 1989: 32). Further, these consequences “do not diminish over time and continue into adulthood without appropriate intervention” (Grossen, 1997: 6).

## **A Working Definition of Adolescents Experiencing Difficulties with Reading**

The research is consistent in its assertion that only a small minority of struggling adolescent readers have problems attributable to a learning disability: “weak reading comprehension, rather than an outright inability to read, is the main affliction of most struggling readers in middle and high schools.” (Allen, 2000: 1) The recently released *My Read: Strategies for teaching reading in the middle years* confirms that:

... for all but the 5-10% of students who have intellectual, sensory or learning disabilities the issue is one of underperformance rather than ability. For the majority of students reaching the middle years of school, recurrent experience of failure and negative perceptions about themselves as readers will be the major obstacles to learning. For these students, performance in reading is likely to be a consequence of a well-learned self-preservation strategy of non-engagement. (DEST, AATE, ALEA, 2003)

The literature identifies such under-performing students variously as “reluctant”, “resistant”, “struggling”, “disaffected”, “disenchanted” or “at-risk” individuals who “for whatever reason, are not achieving their full potential” (Alvermann, 2001: 679).

We know that there remains a disproportionately high number of adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged and non-English speaking backgrounds whose educational and other opportunities are compromised by inadequate literacy skills in reading (McGaw, 1996; Birsh, 1999). Notwithstanding this evidence, however, there is no simple, one-dimensional causal relationship between contextual factors such as gender, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic or linguistic status, and underachievement in reading: “students’ ethnicity, social class, and language do not automatically determine their level of academic achievement” (Au, 1993: 2). Indeed, educational policy in Australia, as it is articulated in *The Adelaide Declaration*, emphasises “the capacity of all young people to learn, and the role of schooling in developing that capacity” (MCEETYA, 1999).

This review of the research literature will examine the findings of a number of significant contemporary studies that provide evidence of effective strategies for improving adolescents’ reading across the secondary school curriculum. The review will consider the range and nature of the research, articulate a number of common assumptions about adolescent reading difficulties, and draw out the commonalities in strategic approaches to this critical educational challenge.

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## PART ONE



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What We Know About Adolescents

13+

Experiencing Difficulties with

Reading

*“ ... Adolescents who struggle with reading are part of the same cloth from which good readers come. Neither group stands alone in opposition to the other; both are bound up in the cultural contexts they inhabit.”*

*(Alvermann, 2001:680 )*

Adolescents 13+ who experience difficulties in meeting the academic literacy demands of the secondary school curriculum in reading cannot be treated as an homogeneous group. The research in the field warns strongly against policy or practice that considers it can meet the needs of *all* adolescents with reading difficulties with a one-size-fits-all program or a neatly packaged solution. Furthermore, as Brock (1998) has shown, the history of literacy education – both in policy and practice – is fraught with myths and furbies.

Fundamental to any consideration of adolescents' reading is an understanding that:

struggling adolescent readers are not beginning readers in need of remedial instruction in phonics or decoding skills. Rather, they are inexperienced readers who need help acquiring and extending the complex comprehension processes that underlie skilled reading in the subject areas (Greenleaf et al, 2001: 8).

This critical distinction between readers who are 'inexperienced' and readers who are 'experienced' is underscored by extensive research that recognises how a range of contextual and material factors contribute to adolescent reading difficulties. What follows is a discussion of the common factors for reading underperformance as they are identified in the research literature.

**Key Point:**

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**The majority of adolescents experiencing difficulties with the literacy demands of the secondary school curriculum are underperforming and inexperienced readers, as distinct from beginning, emergent or experienced readers.**

## ***1. The Learning Environment***

*“Optimal learning occurs in an environment of intrinsic purposeful engagement through supportive instructional methods.”*

*(Taylor and Nesheim, 2000/2001: 309)*

A number of research studies identify the influential role played by the learning environment in the success or otherwise of adolescents with reading problems. Alvermann argues that mainstream schools, through privileging certain kinds of school and classroom literacies over others, often fail adequately to value and make connections between the literacy concepts and skills that students bring to school and the literacy demands they encounter within the school. If individuals do not readily identify with or belong to the prevailing culture of the school – a culture that is manifested in such things as for example, choice of textbooks, reading matter selected by teachers, the language and experience that is valued in the classroom and school – then these individuals may struggle to succeed according to what is often an apparently arbitrary set of academic assessment tasks, and expectations (Alvermann, 2001).

Students are then labelled as ‘at-risk’ or ‘reluctant’ readers because they quickly deduce that if they have little chance of winning the game, they will not play the game at all. Instead they become at best passive and dependent learners, unwilling to take risks, and at worst, disaffected learners who develop a concept of themselves as ‘failures’ (Graves, Juel and Graves, 1998; Hallahan and Kauffman, 2000). As Alvermann goes on to say:

The possibility that as a culture we are making struggling readers out of some adolescents who for any number of reasons have turned their backs on a version of literacy called school literacy is a sobering thought ... Literacy education is less about skill development and more about access to cultural resources and to understandings of how schools that promote certain normative ways of reading texts may be disabling some of the very students they are trying to help. (Alvermann, 2001: 680)

Indeed, there is repeated evidence in the literature that the very practices, culture, and pedagogy, both implicit or explicit, operating in schools that have been designed to assist readers who are struggling may in fact *produce* readers who experience difficulties, who disengage, who lack motivation or who actively resist many or all kinds of reading.

**Key point:**

**Schools and their practices vis-à-vis literacy and reading can position some students as ‘failures’ and thereby institutionalise deficit models of adolescent achievement.**

## ***2. Remedial Reading Classes in High School***

*“Unfortunately the disabled (sic) reader has often been so removed from reading as a tool for living and learning, that he or she has given up.”*  
*(Decker, 1996: 2)*

A familiar example of one such practice has been remedial reading classes in secondary schools. An important distinction must be made here between the successful and acclaimed Reading Recovery Program that has enjoyed wide success in primary schools, and the kinds of remediation typically encountered in a secondary school context. Adolescent students in the latter remedial programs in high schools are often withdrawn from their mainstream classes (where they may have already established strong social relationships), into special classes, which can in turn confirm in the student’s mind, and the teacher’s eyes, the already established view of their lack of reading competence.

In addition, remediation of this kind tends to focus on decontextualised skills, age-inappropriate reading material and the constant lock-step monitoring and evaluating of the student by a teacher. Reading becomes a chore, and too often, “a testing ground for self-worth” (Decker, 1996: 2) merely reinforcing all of the negative perceptions that the struggling adolescent reader has hitherto internalised about reading.

Rarely does remediation of this kind focus on reading for meaning and enjoyment in a purposeful context (Fischer, 2000), or on building the autonomy and agency of the individual student, each of which is critical in arresting and reversing the trend for the unmotivated or struggling adolescent reader who, after all, may already have experienced many years of ‘failure’, and who may perceive reading as something to

be done *only* for dry writing exercises, limiting assessment, or low-level information retrieval, or ‘busywork’.

Pikulski notes that these kinds of remediation programs that “slow down” the processes of reading instruction can mean that struggling readers are “doomed to remain behind” caught in a “cycle of failure” (Decker, 1996: 2): they fall behind in the curriculum areas that they have been withdrawn from for remediation, and are therefore severely impeded in their efforts to maintain synchronicity with their peers (Pikulski, 1997). When they continue to struggle, they are usually “given more of the same” – “heavy skills instruction” that assumes good reading is “all about getting the word right rather than an act of making sense of the material” (Decker, 1996: 3).

Essentially, such programs do not recognise that there are three dimensions of informed, critical and effective reading:

1. semantic and syntactic decoding of what has been read;
2. understanding and comprehending what has been read; and
3. the questioning, interrogating, critiquing, and challenging what has been read and why it has been written.

Instead, such programs concentrate almost exclusively on the first of these three dimensions at the expense of the other two, both of which demand increasingly higher-order thinking skills and knowledge about how and why texts operate within, through, and beyond certain contexts.

**Key point:**

**Remediation programs that decontextualise literacy learning for struggling adolescent readers, and/or focus merely on a ‘getting the word**

**right' approach to reading, can be more harmful than helpful in reversing the individual's reading problems.**

### ***3. Reading Pedagogy - Teaching Strategies***

*To assist the indifferent or struggling reader, we must work to "dismantle the behaviours ... that surround the act of reading."  
(Decker, 1996:2)*

We know that primary school is a time when there is a heavy focus on *learning to read*: in the transition to high school, however, there is a paradigmatic shift in emphasis to *reading to learn*. Once students reach high school, they are required to:

grapple with texts that are expository, dense, and full of new, more difficult vocabulary, especially in maths, science, and social sciences ... But students are not taught how to read those types of texts. (Allen, 2000: 1)

A number of studies have highlighted the extent to which many teachers "resist their role as reading teachers, citing a lack of time, skill, and support" (Holloway, 1999: 80). Yet, there is an overwhelming amount of research linking reading failure, reading resistance, reading reluctance, apathy or a decrease in motivation levels in adolescents to ineffective and even counterproductive classroom reading pedagogy.

The literature provides compelling evidence that specific classroom practices, above all else, are a fundamental factor in enhancing or imperilling students'

success in reading. Studies by Benton (1995), Bushman (1997), Bintz (1993), and Coles et al (1995) demonstrate the ways in which reading, particularly reading for pleasure, diminishes for many adolescents – avid and struggling readers alike – as they progress through high school. This is especially evident for adolescent boys. (Coles, 1995; Martino, 2001; Manuel and Robinson, 2002)

Importantly, gaps in reading pedagogy can and do lead to a failure to equip students with the specific skills they may require to handle the interpretive demands of reading within subject specific contexts. Explicit teaching is a vital aspect of success in harnessing, adapting and translating the reading ability that students already possess, across the curriculum. This entails clarifying the expectations and codes of the language that operates in the subject; giving clear directions to students and explicating the learning goals of each class; and providing instructional support through meaningful and contextualised intervention at the point of need, (as distinct from the often decontextualised systemic functional linguistics approach to texts).

Coles' (1995) survey showed that over “90% of students in each age group (10, 12, 14 year olds) considered themselves to be average or better readers, although the older children are less likely than the younger ones to claim that they are ‘very good’ readers” (Coles, 1995: 14). Similarly, Manuel and Robinson’s survey of adolescents revealed that over 80% of students surveyed rated themselves as “excellent”, “very good” or “good” readers; 19% rated themselves as “average readers”; and only 1% considered themselves as “poor” readers. No students considered themselves to be “not so good” readers (Manuel and Robinson, 2002: 75).

Yet, despite evidence from these and other studies of readers’ self-image, research such as that conducted by Atkinson et al shows that “up to seventy percent of eighth grade students think reading is boring ... these are the same children who started their reading education with enthusiasm and interest in first and second grade” (Atkinson et al, 2002: 159).

Some researchers argue that this noted decrease in reading for pleasure inevitably occurs as students move through the secondary school system committing more and more of their time to school-based learning tasks, thus slicing into the available time for reading for pleasure. This is cause for concern since the literature, and common sense, stresses the link between pleasure reading and the “development of readers” (Reid and Cline, 1997: 68), confirming that reading, like any skill, will improve with immersion in a wide variety of engaging and accessible reading materials.

Bintz (1993) noted that as little as 3% of all secondary school classroom experience is spent on reading – and an even smaller percentage of this on reading for pleasure. Hence, if students are not reading at home, there is little opportunity for them to read at school. For those students who are already carrying the baggage of a negative attitude towards all kinds of school reading, this general trend is even more disturbing when we consider the consequences for personal, cognitive, and overall academic development for the struggling reader.

Similarly, Nunn (1993) found that for many fifteen and sixteen year olds, the pressures of study, exams and social activities left “little time for sustained private reading”, and for these students, reading tends to become a labour associated with “other tedious aspects of school work” (Nunn, 1993: 90-91).

While “passive readers” do the majority of their reading at school in order to “comply with teacher-assigned tasks” or to just “get by” (Bintz, 1993: 609): “reluctant readers” on the other had, “actively avoid reading whenever possible” and are far more likely to experience reading difficulties and apathy (Bintz, 1993: 609). It’s not that these students cannot read, argues Bintz, but that they choose not to: these students have been described by other researchers as “aliterate” (Beers, 1998: 39). For a student to knowingly or unwittingly adopt such a position

bespeaks a form of political and personal action that very cogently comments on the delimiting impact of certain structures and cultures of schooling.

These alarming findings are supported by other research which proposes a clear correlation between reading difficulties and, for example, students' fear of being forced to read aloud in class where their deficiencies might be displayed for all to observe (Cope, 1997: 21). Cope found that this was the most "intensely personal negative experience" for the students he surveyed. Ivey points out that "round-robin reading, a practice that persists in schools despite uncertainty about the origin of its popularity, is especially problematic for struggling middle school readers" (Ivey 1999: 6).

It seems that poor classroom reading pedagogy fails to strike a balance between reading for enjoyment and pleasure – or personal meaning and satisfaction – and reading for academic learning, information-gathering, assessment and writing (Podl, 1995; Thomson, 1987). Too often, reading is perceived as the means to an end of completing mundane comprehension tasks, busy-work worksheets and "unimaginative and uninspiring written exercises" (Thomson, 1987: 52).

At the core of achievement in reading is the ability of the reader to create meaningful and valid connections between the words on the page and his or her lived, imagined, or constructed world of experience. Without excellent pedagogy to support and facilitate the struggling reader's engagement with often demanding and complex texts, reading becomes overwhelmingly challenging: the task of constructing meaning simply becomes out of reach. Some have argued that "children fail to learn to read in school because they aren't being taught correctly". (McGuiness, 1998: 220). Cunningham et al assert that many more students are therefore "instructionally disabled" than are "learning disabled" (Cunningham et al, 2000: 229).

**Key Point:**

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**Well informed teaching practice is pivotal in securing optimal outcomes for adolescents struggling with reading.**

#### ***4. The Issue of Choice and the Selection of What is Read***

***“I pick the one I hate the least.”***

***(Baker, 2002: 2)***

Perhaps the most significant and consistently mentioned catalyst for reading difficulties and plummeting motivation levels in adolescents is inappropriate and ineffectively managed assigned reading materials (Cope, 1997; Bushman, 1997; Ivey, 1999; Williams, 2001). Adolescence is a time when young people need to develop a sense of agency and autonomy, in addition to honing the collaborative and group-work skills necessary for life within and beyond the school and family.

Yet, ironically, it is the struggling adolescent reader who is often given the least amount of choice and ownership when it comes to the *what and the how* of reading material.

Being forced to read ‘difficult’ texts which hold little interest for them diminishes student motivation, fosters feelings of resentment (Bintz, 1993) and creates doubts about the student’s abilities and competencies as a reader (Cope, 1997). Bintz and others propose that a decline in reading is a direct consequence of the *kinds of reading* school and teachers require of students and the *ways* in which such reading is or is not supported by teachers (Ivey, 1999; Williams, 2001; Alvermann, 2001; Atkinson et al, 2002; Decker, 1996; Fischer, 2000).

Further, the evidence suggests that “students do not lose interest in reading per se” (Bintz, 1993: 613), “but instead they lose interest in the kinds of reading they are typically required to do in school, such as reading textbooks and certain teacher selected texts”. (Ivey, 1999: 2).

Wholly teacher-selected reading materials leave little room for students’ diverse interests to be catered for or indeed recognised and valued as part of the curriculum.

In fact, a wide variety of reading material that is accessible and selected by the student at least as regularly as that selected by the teacher is a *critical factor* in ongoing reading achievement. (Bintz, 1993; Coles, 1995; Cope, 1997; Ivey, 1999; Fischer, 2000; Manuel and Robinson, 2002).

How many adults, for example, would tolerate having *all* of their reading materials selected, without consultation, by someone who may or may not know or understand their reading preferences and practices? Why then, should adolescents, particularly adolescents experiencing difficulties with reading, tolerate this form of educational disenfranchisement as the norm in many secondary school classrooms?

Thus, study upon study illuminates the dangers of forcing students to read, without engaging, explicit and supportive teaching strategies, material that they do not like, do not immediately recognise the relevance of, or that they find linguistically or culturally opaque, unyielding and inaccessible. Bintz argues that, for this reason, so-called reading failure should in fact be considered as a “temporary learning problem” (Bintz, 1993: 610) capable of being surmounted with skilled intervention.

## ***5. Disjunctions Between Classroom/School Reading and Beyond School Reading***

*All readers are good readers, when they have the right book.*

(Jeanne Henry, *If Not Now:*

*Developmental Readers in the College*)

Instead of outright resistance to classroom-based and assigned reading, the literature suggests that many adolescents demonstrate resistance through the use of well-honed “survival strategies” (Bintz, 1993: 611).

Quite sophisticated avoidance mechanisms are adopted by some students in order to accommodate the need for completing assessment tasks and to cope with texts imposed upon them that are simply too difficult. These mechanisms include selectively reading parts of the assigned text, avoiding reading the entire text, and reading only in order to respond to assessment tasks, rather than for meaning and understanding.

Interestingly, one study found that many students who viewed themselves as competent readers but whose teachers did not share this view, reported an expectation that school texts would be ‘boring’ – which is often code for ‘uninviting’ or ‘too difficult’. These students “rarely re-read school texts” yet many of these same students reported reading “extensively” at home deploying a range of literacy skills such as note taking, predicting, scanning and skimming (Bintz, 1993: 611). This phenomenon tends to confirm that many students adjust their reading practices and attitudes depending upon the context and purpose of the reading task at hand.

On this point, it is timely to recall Louise Rosenblatt's axiom cited by Berchervaise, that "readers use reading for their own purposes": "the joys of reading depend on both the reading experience and the life experience of the reader" (Berchervaise, 1995: 4). The principle of *purpose and its impact on motivation* is the fuel that drives the reader forward. Without purpose, motivation, and a sense of ownership and control of the process, manifested through a reader's genuine engagement with a text, reading becomes a task devoid of any personally relevant meaning.

It is often the struggling reader who requires effective pedagogical support in the 'engagement' phase of the reading process. Without such support, these readers are at risk becoming incrementally *disempowered* by many of the literacy practices, assumptions, and processes endemic within institutionalised classrooms.

**Key Point:**

**Tapping into and building upon the student's 'literacy capital' is a crucial factor in reading success. To begin where the student is at, to empower and encourage them to explore horizons well beyond this starting point, is a necessary tenet of effective reading pedagogy.**

## ***6. Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Professional Development***

*"Secondary teachers must help the low achieving or low performing student break the cycle of failure. Low performing students need the opportunity to revalue themselves. They need experiences with texts that are relevant. They need to acquire strategies that will result in comprehension. Building confidence is essential to improving*

*performance of secondary readers. Assisting and motivating low performing students is a requisite to improved performance.”*  
(Decker, 1996:3)

Most secondary school teachers do not receive adequate training in and preparation for the teaching of reading (Fischer, 2000).

Apart from English teachers, secondary school subject specialists have not traditionally considered the teaching of reading to be part of their role in the secondary school. The teaching of reading has been confined to the primary school domain, and teachers assume that by the time students arrive in Year 7 they are ‘inoculated’ against reading failure.

Secondary school teachers do not adequately account for the fact that learning to read is an ongoing cognitive need for *all* students. Reading is not a ‘once-and-for-all’ skill that having been acquired can be considered complete for life. Fortunately, in recent years, thanks to high profile effective campaigns and professional development by education departments, there has been a growing awareness and understanding among secondary school teachers for the need to be unambiguous about the literacy demands of their subject and to address the literacy needs of students in their classes in an integrated and accountable way (see for example, NSW State *Literacy Strategy*; NSW Board of Studies Syllabuses).

Repeatedly the literature confirms that success in reading is intimately bound up with the web of teacher attitudes, expectations, reader choice, pedagogy and, crucially, the relationship between the teacher and the learner.

**Key Point:**

Teachers require pedagogical content knowledge that includes knowledge of how best to implement effective strategies for struggling readers in their classes.

## ***7. Teacher Perceptions and Expectations, and the Relationship Between The Learner and the Teacher***

*“The teacher who makes a difference has a knowledge of her students, is alert to the literacy demands of the curriculum, and has a repertoire of flexible practices.”*

*(My Read, DEST, AATE, ALEA, 2003)*

Teacher expectations play a profound role in student success. This role cannot be underestimated in the context of reading performance and outcomes for the struggling reader.

Research tells us that a student’s underachievement in certain reading tasks is *not an accurate measure* of that student’s overall reading competence or literacy skills: so deficit labelling arising from the low expectations of one or more teachers can have a momentous impact on the self-image and motivation of the reader *across the curriculum*. (Thomson, 1987:51)

When students repeatedly ‘fail’ within one or more curriculum area, they begin to believe they are incapable of success so they lose confidence and motivation (Rasinski and Padak, 2000; Westwood, 2001). They may even begin to display a kind of helplessness in the face of tasks that they don’t fully understand.

Teachers need, therefore, to believe that all students can acquire the skills and knowledge to enable them to be successful readers and to share with students the reality that literacy skills are not difficult to acquire – there is no secret knowledge that the struggling reader must discover in order to read well. Indeed, the knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitudes of a successful reader – what they know and can do - are not mysterious ‘prizes’ to be ‘won’ by an elected, privileged few.

When teachers trust in students’ ability to work for personal literacy excellence, and communicate to students a belief that reading competence is eminently achievable, then such students, according to the literature, can and do reach their goals.

The research is clear on this point: given the appropriate conditions, high teacher expectations, and a genuine relationship between the teacher and the student, most students experiencing difficulties with reading are capable of achieving reading success (see, for example, Alvermann, 2001; Williams, 2001).

**Key Point:**

**Teachers need to demystify the reading process. Professional craft knowledge about the reading process and teachers’ willingness to implement literacy strategies within their curriculum area; their expectations of individual students; and the relationship between the teacher and the learner, have a decisive impact on reading outcomes for the adolescent experiencing difficulties.**

## **8. Factors associated with the learner and/or the learner's background**

*“It is probable that no child ever approached the beginning stage of reading with a negative attitude. All young children want to be able to read. Negative attitudes only begin to develop when the child fails and becomes confused ... (they) begin to believe they are incapable of success so they lose confidence and motivation”*

*(Westwood, 2001: 27).*

There is a persistent assumption within the teaching profession and in the wider community that an adolescent struggling with reading, resistant to reading, or simply refusing to read is somehow responsible for his or her own reading failure: it is a genetic problem, a behavioural problem or a ‘learning disability’ or deficit within the student. (Westwood, 2001).

The research literature stresses that this may indeed be the case for a small minority of students: the overwhelming majority of students struggling with reading, however, do so because of factors *other than* their own inherent inability to attain the necessary skills to thrive.

A number of studies shed light on the importance of considering the history of the adolescent's literacy experience by getting to know a student's background.

Researchers have identified a number of factors that can be common in the history of under-performing readers and these include:

- Few positive early childhood reading experiences with the result that children do not associate reading with aesthetic pleasure and personal value (Beers, 1998): “Frequently, students who are not successful in the classroom have not had experiences with language in meaningful, social situations” (Decker, 1996: 2).
- Reading is perceived predominantly as something that occurs in formal learning contexts, leading students to consider reading as “something done solely for learning purposes” (Williams, 2001: 588), rather than in addition, for lifelong personal pleasure, edification, insight, satisfaction and aesthetic reward.
- Students who, for a range of reasons, have not necessarily experienced a *community of readers* or learners - a condition that is vital for reading success.
- Poor self-image as readers, compounded by negative school experiences.
- Students who have not acquired or been taught how to read strategically and for a range of purposes.
- Literacy skills that students *do* possess are not valued, utilised and *connected* to the formal literacies privileged in the school, or worse, are devalued and rejected by the formal and operational academic curriculum.

**Key Point:**

**It is not uncommon to find that limited experience with reading is often mistaken for limited ability in reading (Ivey, 1999: 373). Teachers and school communities must work towards dismantling the hidden curriculum that labels and disenfranchises the adolescent who is**

**experiencing difficulties with reading, and building in its place an environment in which all adolescents have the opportunity to thrive.**

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# PART TWO



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## What Works in Developing the Abilities of Adolescents 13+ Experiencing Difficulties with Reading?

### Strategies for Success

*“The lives of those unable to do something can be either  
enabled or disabled by those around them.”*

*(McDermott and Varenne, 1995: 328)*

It is generally agreed that success in reading:

- a) requires the creation of meaning in collaboration with the author/  
words on the page;
- b) becomes meaningful only when it involves the reader’s response  
and perception of reality through the written word; and

- c) generates its most significant meaning when the reader is engrossed in a process of discovery and genuine engagement. (Atwell, 1987)

All of the research in the field confirms that the strategies required for adolescents struggling with reading to achieve meaning, purpose, engagement and success *can be taught*.

Importantly, the literature underscores the need for early intervention for adolescents with reading difficulties through,

- a) consistent teacher effort to keep students engaged;
- b) creative and relevant instructional practices;
- c) ongoing teacher monitoring of student progress;
- d) self-monitoring of student progress; and
- e) daily reading for enjoyment. (Atkinson et al, 2002)

The literature presents a considerable array of approaches to reading improvement for adolescents 13+. The most significant and recurrent features and characteristics of these are as follows.

## ***1. Student Choice and Access to a Wide Range of Reading Materials***

*“Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read” (Moore et al, 2000: 4).*

At the top of the list of factors influencing the literacy performance of struggling readers is *choice*.

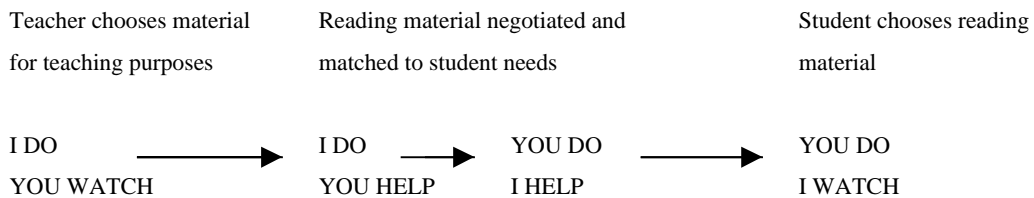
The literature urges a shift towards the use of a wider range of materials in the classroom that are highly compatible with students' reading interests and capacities. It calls for a rethink of the texts that are considered appropriate for classroom use to include those materials, print and electronic, which students are interested in and feel competent and confident with (Bintz, 1993; Podl, 1995; Benton, 1995; Reid and Cline, 1997; Bushman, 1997; Cope, 1997; Holloway, 1999; Manuel and Robinson, 2002). The literature demonstrates clear links between adolescent motivation and the extent of student input into the texts chosen for classroom study.

Podl, for example, experienced great success engaging adolescents in reading by empowering them with ownership of reading through the self-selection of texts which interested them in a guided and independent reading program. This scenario of students with "their noses were buried in their books!" (Podl, 1995: 57) was attributed to deeply-held beliefs that when adolescents were allowed to "assert their independence by making choices" about reading material (Podl, 1995: 57), their inclination and facility for reading increased dramatically.

Again and again, the literature stresses the connection between access to a wide range of reading materials that cater to a diversity and eclecticism of interests and capacities, a balance between teacher-selected and student-selected materials, the recognition and validation of students' reading choices, backgrounds and experiences, and student motivation, engagement and successful reading.

*My Read* (2003), a resource package for reading in the middle years, advocates a number of strategies for supporting and guiding the reader vis-à-vis selection of reading material. One such model explicated in this resource is based on a Vygotskian learner-centred paradigm wherein the teacher and learner are engaged in a dynamic and integrated exchange in the learning enterprise. An overview of the model demonstrates the way in which the teacher and student move through various

domains with an ebb and flow of teacher instruction and support balancing the evolving autonomy and agency of the student (DEST, AATE, ALEA, 2003):



This ‘dance’ between the learner and the teacher reflects the fluid and protean nature of the reading process and validates the capacity of the learner, with support, to make good and appropriate choices about the *what*, the *how*, and the *why* of their reading.

**Key Point:**

**A learning-centred model of classroom practice recognizes the central importance of student choice and access to a wide variety of reading materials in the journey to reading confidence and success.**

## ***2. Time for Reading and Reading for Meaning***

*Students cannot “become experienced until they actually engage in sustained periods of reading. This can be facilitated only when students are provided time to read and access to books they really can read”*

(Ivey, 1999:374 ).

Accomplishment in reading demands a visible commitment to *time* for purposeful, meaningful, and active reading by *all* students.

Time is a critical factor in classrooms where students can participate in reading for enjoyment, learning, and understanding and where they have many opportunities to share and articulate responses to their reading with others.

Time spent reading is necessary for reading success. Class time for conferences, discussion, response, and recommendation facilitates the synchronous growth of reading and writing ... The value of reading, writing and responding is evident in the allocation of class time to do so (Baker, 2002: 367).

Atkinson et al (2002) suggest a tripartite schema of “reading to, with, and by students”: reading *to* students by reading aloud and engaging in interactive questioning; reading *with* students through one-to-one reading, shared reading, choral reading, small group reading, and guided reading; and reading *by* students which is independent reading, and/or guided reading at an appropriate level during sustained, uninterrupted time (Atkinson et al, 2002: 160).

It is vital that adolescents experiencing difficulties with reading can apprehend a tangible, practical, and intrinsic purpose for reading – that is, reading is explicitly connected to an outcome that is more than merely an assessment task or busywork.

Reading to gather, interpret, evaluate, and transform information for projects and research studies; reading to prepare for presentations and peer interaction; reading to build their knowledge and experience for a specific purpose; and reading for enjoyment and pleasure – in short, reading to construct meaning and demonstrate

understanding - are examples that students cite when asked to identify their most profitable experiences of reading in school:

Many reluctant readers found how easy it was to enjoy reading and to learn new reading strategies when they started to believe in their own abilities and to concentrate on meaning and their own interests in a story rather than on what they had come to see as teacherly concerns.

(Thomson, 1998: 189)

**Key Point:**

**Reading in secondary schools deserves its own place in the sun – reading in and for itself needs to be reconsidered as a fundamental process in the integrated learning cycle.**

### ***3. An Optimal Learning Environment***

*We must ask the question “what counts for reading when reading really counts?” (Alvermann, 2001:680)*

The research literature highlights the importance of building a strong, safe, and conducive classroom environment in which all students feel able to call upon the expertise and advice of the teacher and peers.

Struggling readers require an environment that not only “kindles their desire to read” (Allen, 2000: 1) through the processes, choices, and substance of learning tasks, but also nurtures enthusiasm for and sharing of personal reading experiences

on a *regular* basis. The more students *can, do, and want to* read, the more accomplished, confident, and proficient they will become as readers.

Importantly, an optimal learning environment recognises that reading is a literacy skill that is integrally connected to the other literacy skills of talking and listening, writing, and viewing. Abundant opportunities for immersion in these integrated language modes is foundational to effective literacy learning.

In an optimal learning environment students feel accepted and validated *because* of their background or level of achievement: it is a place where their interests and preferences are valued rather than ridiculed or simply ignored. A positive learning environment is one in which students feel they have a contribution to make to the decision-making of the learning group and nature of the curriculum which they are expected to engage with.

A sense of *ownership* of both the content and the processes for reading cannot be underestimated as a powerful force in adolescents' levels of achievement and motivation.

Ideally, the learning environment should be set up in such a way as to promote excellent learning experiences in reading through small group, individual, pairs and whole group workshop approaches with an rich array of exciting, generative, and meaningful learning-centred activities as the foundation. Organising the classroom for co-operative learning in ways which accommodate these approaches enables teachers to work closely with small groups or individuals with guided reading as required, caters for a diversity in students' levels of literacy development, and is "grounded in the notion that individual students within the same classroom can do a variety of literacy activities at once" (Ivey, 1999: 373).

Regular opportunities to talk and share responses and issues relevant to reading is particularly important because some students experiencing difficulties with reading:

also struggle with texts because of subjectivity. Certain words or phrases may trigger irrelevant associations for readers which interfere with an accurate reading.

Irrelevant associations cause readers to ignore portions of a text or pay an inordinate amount of attention to others, so that relationships among statements are distorted and meaning is misconstrued. The learner needs to hear other viewpoints about a text and compare these to his or her own thinking. (Decker, 1996: 2)

Strategies such as, for example,

- “Think, Pair, Share”,
- “Jigsaws”,
- “Readers’ Theatre”,
- Role play,
- Hot seating,
- Improvised dramatic interpretations,
- “Thinking Hats”,
- Double entry journals,
- Left-hand side of the page reading logs, and
- Reading on tape

as well as the use of cognitive organizers such as mind-maps are all powerful ways to anchor the experience of reading and provide possibilities for expressing responses to that reading for those experiencing difficulties. A framework for practice such as Cambourne’s “Seven Conditions of Language Learning” (1987), for instance, is a clear blueprint for teachers for establishing and maintaining a productive learning environment. Cambourne’s model requires immersion,

demonstration, expectation, responsibility, approximation, employment, and feedback for all teaching and learning.

Within an optimal learning environment, teachers can efficiently monitor student progress, tailor lessons and materials to suit multifarious student needs, and intervene with individualized assistance when required. In this way, students are not withdrawn from their contextualised literacy learning within the curriculum disciplines and stigmatized as ‘deficient’, but are instead catered for within a meaningful and familiar learning context.

The literature stresses the inadequacy and what is more the dangers of classroom practice that relies exclusively on whole-class teacher-directed pedagogy, since this pedagogy militates against the needs of individual students, particularly the struggling reader. Importantly, a balanced pedagogy can guard against the phenomenon identified by Alvermann whereby:

Individuals who recognize and are recognized by others like themselves as being struggling readers often end up the recipients of what Finn (1999) called a “domesticating” education – that is, an education that stresses “functional literacy, literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome” (pp. ix-x) (Alvermann, 2001: 682).

Clearly, issues such as class size, workshops models, peer tutoring, guided reading, wide reading, purposeful and strategic reading, and the integration of “mini-lessons” (al a Atwell) are key considerations in many of the programs detailed in the literature. Many of the readers’ workshops, for example, advocate class sizes of around 15-20 students, with considerable emphasis placed upon student-teacher negotiation of the content, process, and products of the learning.

Ultimately, an optimal learning environment rejects the limiting determinism of a narrow “functional literacy” model of reading improvement. It instead recognizes that students and teachers are part of a community of learners who celebrate the empowering possibilities of being fully and richly literate through models that move well beyond the confines of the merely functional, which is, after all, necessary but certainly not sufficient.

**Key Point:**

**Enabling and empowering students to exercise control over language in all of its forms depends upon an expert teacher and a learning environment that nurtures individual differences in a non-competitive, non-punitive setting.**

#### ***4. Building a Community of Readers***

*“Sharing favourite books with peers is especially appealing to less successful and reluctant readers whose prior experiences with public reading consisted mainly of whole-class, round-robin readings of texts that were either too difficult, uninteresting, or both. When students have a chance to choose the books they will share and to rehearse before they read aloud, they can feel like competent, valued members of their classroom literacy communities” (Ivey, 1999: 376).*

An optimal learning environment builds trust within a community of readers through its emphasis on:

- time for authentic reading experiences,

- the minimizing of risk in sharing,
- structured and unstructured experimentation, exploration and response,
- constructive feedback,
- support and facilitation,
- explicit instruction,
- and modelling of excellent reading behaviours, strategies, and practices.

Discontinuities between the learner's background experience and the culture of the school can be redressed through the creation and maintenance of a context that builds upon, in overt and tangible ways, that which the student brings to school as part of their personal literacy 'capital'. This ensuing sense of belonging to a community of readers is critical for success in reading, according to a substantial number of recent research studies. Community-building strategies include:

- establishing workshops in specific curriculum areas in which students are taught to work together in small groups with clearly defined roles on a shared task or tailor-made assignments based on interest and capacity;
- linking the teaching of reading with writing, talking, listening and viewing;
- using surveys that ask students to record their literacy habits, preferences in reading, and perceived impediments to learning;
- regular "literature circles" in the humanities;
- enlisting the support of other teachers to participate in programs across the curriculum, and across the educational sectors;
- "reciprocal reading" programs that exploit the concept of the apprentice and the expert, can operate within the mainstream classrooms in all curriculum areas (Berchervaise and Sneddon, 1995);
- the imaginative, creative, integrated, and productive use of technology to assist in building higher-order literacy skills;
- "cross-age tutoring" (Jacobsen et al, 2001) and,

- the sense of community triggered by *the teacher reading aloud and modelling effective strategies for fluency and comprehension as well as enthusiasm for reading*. For example, tone of voice, inflexions, pauses, predicting, hypothesizing, and so on, during reading can have a powerful impact on the adolescent who may have had very limited exposure to the joy of shared reading.

Each of these approaches has proven beneficial effects on the adolescent experiencing difficulties with reading and each is predicated on the rationale that an authentic, committed, and respectful relationship between the teacher and the learner/s is a key ingredient in the literacy mix.

**Key Point:**

**Building a community of readers means equipping students with the strategies they need to be independently successful in all manner of contexts, and encouraging in them the inclination to *read more with more purpose* well beyond the walls of the school classroom.**

## ***5. Utilising Teacher and Student Generated Audio-Visual Resources***

*“Any medium which stimulates students’ interest and involvement is worthy of consideration” (Decker, 1996: 3).*

Some researchers such as, for example, Giorgis, Williams, Ivey, Mulholland, and Baker, advocate the reading aloud of picture books as a productive teaching strategy in secondary English and other subject area classrooms since “good

literature, no matter in what format can be enjoyed by individuals of all ages” (Giorgis, 1999: 57).

Giorgis believes all secondary students should be read to, citing research which identifies a “positive correlation between a student's being read to and his or her own ability as a reader and writer” (Giorgis, 1999: 52). Recent studies have found that reading aloud picture books to adolescents and modeling good reading practice, are successful methods for creating attitudinal changes towards reading: “the attitudes of adolescents, particularly those of boys, can be made more positive through the use of teacher reading and follow-up teacher student discussion activities” (Herrold and Serabian, 1989: 46).

Building the experiential background of students through a cache of resources can be immensely helpful to the reader experiencing difficulties, since he or she often lacks an extensive pool of language experience upon which to draw in the reading process:

When a text refers to things or concepts with which the reader has no familiarity, he or she will not comprehend the material. Films and television can help enlarge experience and supply vocabulary (Decker, 1996: 4).

The use of audio-visual resources, then, can make an enormous difference to readers who may be experiencing difficulties with the conceptual demands of a text. Newspapers, magazines, pictures, film, music, and other teaching and learning resources can provide manifold avenues for acquiring information, accessing texts, and constructing meaning for the reader.

**Key Point:**

**Resourceful, imaginative and creative teachers and students recognize that a rich range of resources can be a potent means of linking the ‘real’ world with the world of the classroom and its learning enterprise.**

## ***6. Meaningful and practical assessment***

*“What you do speaks so loudly they can't hear what you say.”*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Too frequently, according to the literature, assessment of reading is perfunctory and limited to decontextualised basic-skills tests or other standardized tests of highly dubious value in measuring a student’s accomplishment and capabilities in reading.

The teacher-centred ‘passage-plus-questions’ approach to testing a student’s understanding of and response to what they have read, for example, is an orthodoxy of much teaching practice, despite its well researched limitations and deleterious effects on student motivation and engagement.

Similarly, while reading aloud is an indicator of fluency in reading, fluency in itself is not an accurate indicator of a student’s comprehension and understanding. Taylor and Decker (1982) have proposed a range of 22 alternative strategies for “variety in comprehension work” that can be adapted in most curriculum areas and these strategies require students to read for meaning and understanding, and to critique and transform what they read. These include, for instance, students compiling questions, predicting, sequencing materials, drawings, diagrams, mind-mapping,

interrogating characters/ideas through role play and hot-seating, debates, interviews, changing the form, and skimming and scanning.

Adapting well-know resources such as Bloom’s Taxonomy and De Bono’s “Thinking Hats” can provide all teachers with effective models both to structure students’ reading tasks so that they engage in higher-order thinking skills – rather than mere regurgitation of information or completion of dummy-runs – and also to assess a student’s levels of comprehension and understanding, which after all, is one of the central goals of reading. Merely assessing how fast or how fluently a student can read is a highly inaccurate measure of how well that student has understood the *what* and the *why* of a text.

Atkinson et al insist that reading assessment use both

product and process assessments to document student progress across the academic year. It is critical to address the individual needs of all students as readers ... It would be rare to find a school classroom in which all students have the same reading proficiency. Thus, guided or instructional reading where all students within a classroom read (only) the same text sets struggling readers up for failure. (Atkinson et al, 2002: 160)

**Key Point:**

**A ‘one-size-fits all’ or “cookie cutter” (Allen, 2002: 1) approach to reading improvement ignores the fundamental principle of reading pedagogy: value individual differences and build upon the literacy capital that each student brings to the reading classroom.**

## ***7. Teachers Who Understand, are Committed to, and Can Implement Excellent Pedagogy***

*“Education is not the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting of a fire.”*  
W.B. Yeats

Teachers are powerful agents influencing student achievement. Each of the strategies for success in adolescent reading detailed thus far relies upon the expertise, commitment, and informed practice of an excellent teacher.

The International Reading Association recently published a position statement, setting out a description of “the distinguishing qualities of excellent classroom reading teachers” (IRA, 2000: 193). The position statement declares that “excellent reading teachers share critical qualities of knowledge and practice:

1. They understand reading and writing development and believe that all children can learn to read and write.

2. They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
3. They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
4. They offer a variety of materials and texts for students to read.
5. They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
6. They are good reading 'coaches' – that is they provide help strategically.” (IRA, 2000: 193-194)

Research endorses these principles and highlights the need for *all teachers of adolescents* to accept responsibility for addressing the needs of particular struggling readers in their subject specific classes. Across-the-curriculum targeted reading strategies can be eminently useful and beneficial for the struggling reader and can include modelling practices such as:

- thinking aloud;
- constructing images;
- astute summarizing;
- predicting;
- making connections to known knowledge;
- activating prior knowledge;
- questioning and hypothesizing;
- clarifying; and
- analysing text structures and features. (Pressley, 1998)

Teachers can be empowered by knowledge and understanding of processes for supporting students' reading that may already operate in some curriculum areas such as English. The 'four categories of classroom experience' for reading is, for example, an extremely useful framework for teachers across the curriculum:

1. *Pre-reading strategies* – getting ready for the text. These may include, for instance, the use of stimulus materials, discussions on a relevant theme, an excursion, a parallel experience, mystery boxes, and ‘building the field’ and heightening anticipation in preparation for engagement with the text.
2. *Engagement strategies* - during reading. These may include, for instance, the use of cognitive organizers such as Venn diagrams, word webs, time-lines, drawings, diagrams, reading logs, inventories, question catalogues, hypothesizing, listing, and prediction activities.
3. *Response strategies* – after reading. These may include, for instance, a myriad of kinds of written responses from creative writing to scientific reports, oral presentations, group projects or research, presentations to other groups beyond the classroom, publishing in a variety of contexts and media, dramatic representations, visual responses, or recordings.
4. *Moving Beyond the Text* – after response. This category of experience leads students beyond the specific text to other related materials, ideas, or possibilities that have emerged from their engagement and responses.

Similarly, *all* teachers should know and understand the ‘four roles of the reader’ as set out in the NSW DET *State Literacy Strategy* and *My Read* (2003):

### ***Four Roles/Resources of the Successful Reader***

#### **What successful readers know and do:**

**Code breaker:** decoding the codes and conventions of written, spoken and visual text

Understand

- the relationship between spoken sounds and written symbols
- the grammar of texts
- the structural conventions of texts

**Text user:** understanding the purposes of different written, spoken and visual texts for different cultural and social functions

Know that

- different types of texts have different purposes
- these purposes shape the way texts are structured and formed
- Apply this knowledge in using (eg comprehending, creating, transforming) text

**Text participant:** comprehending written, spoken and visual texts

Make meaning by drawing on

- own experiences and prior knowledge
- knowledge of similar texts

**Text analyst:** understanding how texts position readers, viewers and listeners

Is aware and can identify how

- texts are not ideologically natural or neutral but are crafted to represent the views and interests of the writer
- information, ideas and language in texts influence reader perceptions
- texts empower or disempower certain groups. (*My Read*, 2003)

Teachers cannot assume that their students, *a priori*, are equipped with the knowledge of and skills required for these reading roles, nor can they assume that the English teacher carries the sole caretaker responsibility for monitoring and attending to students' literacy skills. Literacy skills operate within and through particular contexts such as subject areas: they do not exist as discrete skills in a contextual vacuum.

Part of every teacher's pedagogical oeuvre should be the capacity to "develop and enhance the conceptual, procedural, and textual knowledge" of students in their

classes (Van Horn, 2001: 68), and to render accessible the often assumed or hidden literacy expectations of the subject. Students experiencing difficulties with reading can potentially master these subject specific requirements when and if they become cognisant of them.

Models such as the one set out above - the *Four Roles of the Successful Reader* - can be of enormous benefit to students since it clarifies the roles and tasks required of the reader in a range of reading contexts. This is what is meant by explicit, supported teaching and learning.

Excellent teachers of reading model their enthusiasm for and enjoyment of reading which can in turn inspire the desire to read in their students. Such teachers have a passion for reading and perceive it as an integral part of their day-to-day lives – not just something associated with academic or formal learning. Excellent teachers of reading hold the highest expectations of their students and do not expect their students to do what they themselves are not prepared to do.

Excellent teachers of reading insist that students demonstrate a level of personal commitment to reading as a key ingredient in reading success.

Baker et al (2000) provide a very useful checklist for teachers who are working with struggling readers. This extensive list enables teachers to plan, program, implement and reflect upon quality teaching and learning for the reader who is experiencing difficulties.

Similarly, *My Read* (2003) provides a valuable checklist for students to assist them in self-monitoring and developing their reading. This is reproduced in the Appendix.

**Key Point:**

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**Teachers need to be fully equipped with the craft knowledge to address and meet the needs of adolescents experiencing difficulties with reading in their classes, regardless of the curriculum area they teach in. There is an abundance of proven effective strategies and programs for getting students to where they want and need to be.**

## **8. *"The Best Learning is Fun"***

The more that you read,  
the more things you will know.  
The more that you learn,  
the more places you'll go.  
~ Dr. Seuss ~

Engaged learning is fun because it is challenging, relevant, and purposeful but is supported in a way that makes success possible. (DEST, AATE, ALEA, 2003)

It is perhaps too easy to forget that adolescents, like children and adults, thrive when their needs, interests, and capacities are recognized, valued, and considered.

Amidst the hustle of the secondary school day, typically structured in discrete curriculum bites, students are in a constant state of flux as they adapt to and accommodate the varying (and it must be said, at times, conflicting or opposing) demands, expectations, and cultures of different teachers in different classes. It is perhaps also easy to forget, or at least to underestimate, the profound potential for

enjoyment and ‘play’ to heighten adolescents’ learning experiences, regardless of curriculum-specific imperatives.

Of course, not all learning tasks can or should be entertaining: a balance of enjoyment and serious pursuit needs to be struck by the teacher and students alike.

The literature on adolescent reading difficulties does, however, consistently highlight the link between *enjoyment and success in reading outcomes* for students who struggle to fulfill their potential as readers.

**Key Point:**

**Notwithstanding the gravity of much of the content of the secondary school curriculum and its rigorous assessment demands, research confirms the powerful nexus between enjoyable and meaningful immersion in purposeful reading, and heightened reading proficiency.**

## Conclusion

*We care about texts for many reasons, not the least of which is that they bring us news that alters our way of interpreting things. If this were not the case, the Gospels and the teaching of Karl Marx would have fallen on deaf ears. Textual power is ultimately power to change the world.*

(Robert Scholes, 1985: 165)

There is no doubt that one of the central goals of education is the development of accomplished and motivated readers.

It is a sobering to consider then, that some of the embedded practices, structures, and aspects of the culture of schooling continue to undermine this fundamental objective for many adolescents experiencing difficulties with reading. The literature repeatedly demonstrates that ineffective and ill-informed pedagogy can have serious deleterious effects on the struggling or reluctant adolescent reader.

Conversely, the literature also stresses the power of the teacher “to act to good effect” (Boomer): this axiom is nowhere more apparent than in the realm of reading pedagogy.

We know *why* adolescents struggle with the literacy demands of the curriculum in secondary schools. We also know *how* to ‘enable’ these readers.

Why then, do we continue to see adolescents entering and leaving secondary school, not just here in Australia, but across geographic and demographic boundaries, who do not achieve the literacy goals prescribed in the mandated curriculum?

The response to this question does not just lie with ongoing research: there is an abundance of research that has detailed an array of programs, techniques, and practices that have been and continue to be successful in addressing needs of adolescents<sup>13+</sup> with reading difficulties.

The response to the question lies rather in the need to translate what we already know about the *why* of reading difficulties and the *how* of reading success in adolescence into *real classroom practice*.

It is perhaps the case, that where struggling adolescent readers are concerned, good reading pedagogy is ‘more honoured in the breach than in the observance’.

If and when the secondary school curriculum can be structured to recognize, value and meet the needs of readers experiencing difficulties, and *all teachers* are expertly equipped with meaningful and practical knowledge, skills, and understandings about *how and in what ways to teach reading*, then we are, according to the research literature, well on the way towards promoting a community of readers that is inclusive, comprehensive, and highly accomplished,

and whose members engage in reading as “an authentic social activity that can transform us all” (Van Horn, 2001: 68).

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## APPENDIX

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1. From *My Read*, DEST, AATE, ALEA, 2003

## 1. From *MY READ* (2003)

### FOR STUDENTS

## READING TACTICS

### Choose your BEFORE reading goals

Highlight one item for your reading goal and write the date you start to work towards it.

### Things I can do to help me choose the right book

- Read the title and look at the cover of the book.
- Read the blurb to see if the book interests me.
- Check the author's name to see if I know the author's work.
- Flick through the book and check the chapter headings.
- Look at illustrations, speech bubbles, conversations or other features.
- Guess what the story might be about.
- Start thinking about what the characters or places in the story might be like.

### Everyday before I read

- Quickly skim the pages I read last time, to remind me what has happened so far.
- Think about and predict (or guess) what might happen next.
- Think what the characters might do.

- Picture the places and the characters in the story.
- Think what questions I want answered.
- Decide what I will do while I am reading.

### **Choose your DURING reading goals**

*For Discussion Managers, Investigators and Illustrators*

Highlight one item for your reading goal and write the date you start to work towards it.

#### **Setting**

- Imagine/draw/talk about the places in the story.
- Picture the places in different parts of the story.
- Try to work out why the author chose the setting.

#### **Plot or story**

- Make 'a video in my head' as I read.
- Remember what has happened so far.
- Look for dialogue (talk) that tells about the actions in the story.
- Try to work out why the author made particular things happen.
- Answer the questions I thought of before I started reading.
- Think about how the story is like or not like my life.
- Think about why the author chooses to tell, or not tell, some details.
- Think about different interpretations of the text.

#### **Characters**

- Picture what the people in the story look like.
- Imagine how characters feel.
- Imagine what I would do.
- Think about the people I know who are like the characters in the story.
- Explain what I think of a character and find supporting evidence in the text.

- Think about the characters and guess how they might react.
- Find dialogue (talk) that tells me more about the characters in the story.
- Try to work out why the author made the character behave in certain ways.
- Look for stereotypes in the story.

### **Author's style**

- Look for great phrases, sentences or words.
- Find techniques the author uses to build up excitement, humour or suspense.
- Talk about metaphors and similes and other literary devices.

### **Choose your DURING reading goals**

*For Code Breakers*

Code Breakers always check their understanding

Highlight one item for your reading goal and write the date you start to work towards it.

### **While I am reading:**

- Check that I understand what I read.
- Make little summaries or pictures in my head.
- Look for answers to my questions.
- Stop reading at an exciting part and predict what might happen next; I read on to check or change my prediction.
- Check the picture or diagram if there is one.

### **If my reading does not make sense:**

- Think about what I already know and see if that helps me work out the meaning.
- Go back to where I **can** make sense of the reading and make a picture in my mind,
- then read on slowly and predict what could happen next (sometimes reading aloud helps here).
- Use some of my tricky words techniques like:
  - say a word that would make sense and keep reading
  - leave out the word and keep reading
  - reread the sentence and then keep reading

- look for a little word in the big one
- look at the first part of the word and guess
- cover the prefix or suffix and see if I can work out the rest of the word
- check the pictures or diagrams
- sound out the word
- ask a friend to help

### **As a great code breaker I am learning about English letter patterns**

I notice words that have the same letter clusters but make different sounds, eg

- 'ou' in would, count, dough, through, enough.
- I find words that have the same sounds.
- I find words with the same meaning base.
- I find words that have the same prefix.
- I find words with the same suffix.

### **Choose your AFTER reading goals**

Highlight one item for your reading goal and write the date you start to work towards it.

### **When I finish reading:**

- Think if there are any similar stories I've read.
- Compare characters from different stories to the characters in this story or movie.
- Discuss how the story is like my life.
- Think about the story from a different point of view.
- Identify the author's message and explain my opinions.
- Discuss the writing techniques used by the author (imagery, humour, word selection).
- Go back to the parts that I enjoyed and tell why I liked them.

Life happened because I turned  
the pages.

~ Alberto Manguel ~  
*A History of Reading, 1996*