

REPORT

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The Need

Reading is an absolutely essential skill in our society for academic, social, and economic success. Consequently, reading has been a central focus of many recent educational improvement efforts. Considerable investments have been made to strengthen reading instruction in the primary grades, yet comparatively, very little has been done concerning older students' reading (Rycik & Irvin, 2001). While a majority of children leave third grade able to read well, unfortunately, many—estimated at more than 8 million students—continue to struggle with reading in grade 4 and beyond. Even strong third-grade readers are not guaranteed future success; they are at risk for later academic problems if reading instruction is neglected in the middle and upper grades (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

On the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 36% of fourth-grade students and 27% of eighth-grade students scored at the lowest achievement level (“basic”), signifying only “partial mastery of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work” for their respective grade levels in reading (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Unfortunately, the problem does not appear to be diminishing. The NAEP reading achievement levels of students in grades 4 and 8 have changed very little since 2002—increasing slightly in grade 4 and decreasing slightly in grade 8. The large race- and income-based gaps in performance have largely persisted as well (Perie et al., 2005).

Reading problems cannot be expected to vanish without targeted intervention, and over time the negative impact of reading difficulties intensifies, affecting students in a variety of ways. Longitudinal studies have documented that approximately three quarters of students with reading problems in the third grade continue to experience reading problems by ninth grade (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996).

Although reading deficiencies may appear to be specific and narrow in the primary grades, they tend to become generalized over time, affecting cognitive development and overall performance in school (Stanovich, 1986). Related, a variety of emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems tend to accompany reading deficiencies early on, and these often strengthen as students enter middle school, when literacy demands increase and shift toward reading for the purpose of gaining knowledge. These problems often include anxiety, low confidence in reading ability, poor motivation, lack of persistence, and work avoidance strategies (Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal, & Cusenbary, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

Although the intense focus on improving primary-level reading instruction is important and necessary, clearly it is not sufficient by itself. With 36% of fourth graders and 27% of eighth graders not reading at a proficient level, targeted intervention is needed for significant numbers of struggling readers in the middle grades to boost their skills, motivation, and confidence as readers.

These were the goals behind the development of *Read Now™ Power Up!*,™ a research-based reading intervention program for struggling readers in grades 5 through 9. This paper outlines the research foundation behind *Read Now Power Up!* and summarizes the results of efficacy studies conducted on the components of the program.

Overview of *Read Now Power Up!*

Read Now Power Up! is a targeted intervention designed to help students in grades 5 through 9 become successful readers. It is based on more than 30 years of reading research, and reflects conclusions reached by expert panels, such as the National Reading Panel and other

literacy scholars, by combining scientifically based, research-evidenced instructional and assessment techniques in a single, comprehensive approach. The program is the result of a collaboration of two of education's most respected leaders: Steck Vaughn (a Harcourt Achieve imprint), a premier publisher of instructional materials since 1936 and Renaissance Learning, developer of computerized progress monitoring technologies since 1986. It combines the best elements of two existing programs for struggling readers—Steck Vaughn's *Power Up! Building Reading Strength* and Renaissance Learning's *Read Now*.

Read Now Power Up! provides direct, explicit, systematic instruction in critical reading skills through high-interest, age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction paperback books. Comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonics, phonemic awareness, and the reading-and-writing connection are taught and practiced in whole-groups and small-groups, as well as independently. All activities are supported through computerized progress-monitoring technology. The program is designed for students in grades 5 through 9 who are reading two to three grade levels below their current grade.

Schools receive comprehensive *Read Now Power Up!* classroom kits that contain materials for 24 students. A full four-level kit contains 416 books, and each level contains 12 copies of 8 individual titles (96 books per level, 4 levels) and one copy of each extension book (an additional 32 books). Also included are student Workout Books with activities related to the paperbacks, complete teacher instructional materials, materials on audio cassette and CD-ROM (for students needing extra support when reading their paperbacks), Web-based activities, computer-based assessments such as STAR Reading (a reliable and valid periodic assessment), plus four types of quizzes that are administered several times a week: paperback chapter comprehension quizzes, end-of-book skills quizzes, and end-of-book vocabulary quizzes, and Power Reading comprehension and vocabulary quizzes.

Although there is flexibility to personalize instruction and modify lessons as the teacher deems necessary, *Read Now Power Up!* classes follow a consistent structure. Classes begin each day with a whole group read-aloud activity in which the teacher introduces and

models a comprehension strategy, and the class reads aloud together and practices the strategy. Students then break into two groups for small-group instruction or independent activities. During small-group instruction, students work with the teacher to read and complete lessons on a leveled, high-interest paperback chapter book. When students are not taking part in small-group instruction, they work independently by reading, taking chapter and end-of-book quizzes on the computer, or working on developing reading fluency.

Other important components of the program are its inclusion of professional development (both remote and on-site) and comprehensive technical assistance for teachers. These services begin when schools receive their materials and continue throughout implementation to help teachers learn the curriculum, analyze their data, get questions answered, and learn additional strategies. Because all data (quiz scores, etc.) are automatically stored on secure Web servers hosted by Renaissance Learning, the implementation specialists and consultants that deliver training can help teachers analyze and understand their actual class and student performance data.

Finally, the program seeks to build a strong school-to-home connection by providing parents with easy-to-understand progress reports as well as strategies to reinforce the activities their children are learning in class.

The next two sections of this paper describe characteristics of struggling readers in the middle grades, and explain how *Read Now Power Up!* reflects best practices for helping those students become successful readers.

Struggling Readers in the Middle Grades

Struggling readers in the middle grades are a diverse group in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Most are weak in more than one critical area, with the most common problems being poor word recognition and comprehension skills. Poor comprehension ability may be related to a lack of comprehension strategies, vocabulary, or background knowledge. Or, it may be a consequence of poor decoding and fluency skills—students that struggle to read words may expend so much effort on that task that there is little energy remaining to consider the meaning of what has been read, limiting comprehension. Still other students can read words

accurately and have developed adequate comprehension strategies for certain subjects or types of text but have difficulty applying those strategies in unfamiliar or abstract situations. These students may have difficulty transitioning from narrative to expository texts.

Intervention strategies to help students overcome these barriers must be comprehensive and address each critical reading skill (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Chall, 1983; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991; Peterson et al., 2000; Riggs & Gil-Garcia, 2001; Samuels, 1994).

Interrelated with reading difficulties are a variety of psychological, emotional, and social problems. Common problems include anxiety, low confidence, poor motivation, low self-expectations, lack of persistence, and social isolation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Peterson et al., 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). Students are well aware of their reading problems, and due to the embarrassment that accompanies those problems, develop strategies to “save face” in class and/or avoid work that requires reading (Peterson et al., 2000). Problems of persistence and motivation have been characterized by Butkowsky and Willows (1980) as symptoms of a pattern of “learned helplessness,” in which students quit tasks that they prematurely perceive to be too difficult. When students improve their reading abilities, they can break free of these negative behaviors and attitudes.

Transitioning from elementary school to middle school presents new challenges that can be especially difficult for struggling readers. First, middle school places increased literacy demands on students, yet reading skills are generally no longer explicitly taught. As students progress through school, they must rely more and more on their ability to read increasingly varied and complicated content to acquire knowledge (Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 2001; Wilson, 1999). Secondly, by middle school, many students, not just struggling readers, begin to read less outside of school and become more likely to develop negative attitudes about reading. These tendencies are most prevalent in struggling readers (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Strategies That Work

Programs designed to help struggling adolescent readers become proficient must take into account the diverse

nature of reading difficulties facing students and the emotional and behavioral issues that typically accompany such difficulties. Analyses of the particular needs of struggling adolescent readers and findings compiled from research on effective instructional strategies found in the *Reading Next* report, the National Reading Panel report, and the *Building Reading Proficiency at the Secondary Level* report have concluded that adolescent reading interventions should do the following:

- **Motivate** students to read
- Improve **comprehension** through strategy use and application
- Improve **decoding** skills
- Improve **fluency** skills
- Improve **vocabulary** skills
- Build connections between **reading and writing**
- Provide time, support, and feedback for **reading practice** (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Gaskins, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Peterson et al., 2000).

The research behind each of these principles is summarized next, along with descriptions of relevant *Read Now Power Up!* components.

Motivation

If students are to become proficient readers, they must read independently and with persistence. This will not happen unless students are motivated and interested in reading. Struggling readers are often less motivated to read and consequently do considerably less reading both in school and at home (Campbell, Hambo, & Mazzeo, 2000; Dreher & Baker, 2003; Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

Experts such as Guthrie and Davis (2003) and Moje, Young, Readence, and Moore (2000), and findings from the *Reading Next* report (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) have outlined instructional models based on extensive reviews of motivation research. The models are intended to improve motivation, and more broadly engagement, for struggling readers in the middle grades. Many characteristics of *Read Now Power Up!* align with these recommendations.

Learning and knowledge goals. The use of thematic units, content objectives, and the integration of reading instruction and strategies within the subject/theme being covered—these are more strongly related to improving student engagement than having reading skills serve as the end goal (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). The *Reading Next* report suggests that embedding instruction within a context also helps to reinforce reading skills and strategies that can facilitate comprehension and learning from text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Such facilitation can promote greater engagement and motivation for reading. The *Read Now Power Up!* instruction and reading materials are organized thematically, and the themes focus on character-building objectives such as “Do the Right Thing: Integrity,” “Work it Out: Conflicts,” “Take a Stand: Leadership,” and “Respect All Voices: Respect,” among others. Two themes are included in each of the four levels, and four books—two fiction and two nonfiction—are grouped under each theme. A total of 12 different themes are available. Within each theme, each fiction/nonfiction pairing also focuses on one of the eight key comprehension strategies as well as a specific fiction or nonfiction reading strategy as applicable to the paperback.

Interaction with real-world and personal issues.

The use of historical or current events in texts and in reading and writing tasks that are personally relevant to students’ lives have been shown through research to greatly improve student engagement. The *Reading Next* report concluded that making this relevancy explicit to students is key to increasing motivation. The fiction and nonfiction books used in *Read Now Power Up!* were created specifically for the program and include topics, characters, and conflicts that are interesting and relevant to middle-school students. The instructional activities provide for large- and small-group discussion and more in-depth exploration of each topic, and the student Workout Books contain reading and writing activities for each theme that engage students on a personal level. In addition, Teacher’s Editions provide suggestions of how to help students directly connect with the themes and relate them to their own lives.

Peterson et al. (2000) describe the interaction between text and reader as transaction (Rosenblatt, 1978), and it is also known as dialog or reader response. A skilled reader engages in a personal dialogue with text (Alexander, 1997; Henk, Stahl, & Melnick, 1993),

which helps the student to identify with a text and to negotiate a real-world meaning of that text, resulting in gains in understanding. Teachers should model transactions for students, and the *Read Now Power Up!* materials and strategies provide numerous opportunities to do so. Each lesson begins with a read-aloud activity in which the teacher reads text and uses the think-aloud technique to model what they are thinking about while reading. Think alouds are used to make the invisible process of thinking while reading visible. Students then apply this strategy to Think-Along questions they are prompted to answer while reading each paperback chapter. All books include Think-Along prompts—questions to help students consider the meaning of what they are reading. Transaction strategies such as these support motivated reading practice, and ultimately, comprehension.

Interesting, diverse, and relevant material. Central to motivating students to read is the use of interesting trade books and related materials (e.g., multimedia) as part of instruction. Specifically, using texts that feature adolescent characters, issues, and social crises is vital. However, Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999), through a survey of sixth-grade, middle-school students, found that the types of books and topics that are most interesting to middle-school students are not typically found in their classroom reading materials. In an extension of this research, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) concluded through their survey results that there should be access to a wide variety of texts with a diversity of reading difficulty within a variety of genres available to students. *Reading Next* suggests that diversity in conjunction with readability is an important factor to increasing engagement. Providing students with high-interest books that are written below a student’s frustration level will lead to greater enjoyment for the struggling reader. The paperback books that students read as part of *Read Now Power Up!* span four grade levels and were specially written with student input to ensure that they are of interest to middle-level students. Each book is carefully leveled for readability to ensure that students read texts at their individual reading level, and experience success and enjoyment. Representing a variety of genres, the books feature topics and situations that are highly interesting and relevant to the target grade range of the program. The books’ characters represent a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and races. In addition,

the program includes a strong multimedia component, including a CD-ROM and an audiocassette for each paperback book. These materials offer an extra level of scaffolding for students that need additional help while reading. The tapes and CDs can also help strengthen students' fluency as they listen to a modeled reading while following along in their paperback.

Student choice. To improve students' motivation and engagement, they need to be given some degree of autonomy in instructional tasks, assessment, and/or reading materials (Hosking & Teberg, 1998; Worthy et al., 1999). Teachers using *Read Now Power Up!* are provided with suggestions to help students assess themselves as readers and writers. These suggested activities are available after each reading selection and writing assessment, along with rubrics students may use to evaluate their own writing.

Read Now Power Up! includes time for guided independent reading of library books in addition to the paperbacks students read as part of the curriculum. Students select their own books with guidance from their teacher. The Web-based software that comes with the program allows students to find books that interest them using various search criteria, including topic, author, keyword, theme, and reading level. As with the program's paperback books, there are comprehension and vocabulary quizzes available for library books.

Each student also has his/her own personalized Web page that keeps track of books they have read and quizzes they have taken. Teachers can review quiz results along with other student performance data to guide students to appropriate texts, offer additional instruction as necessary, and provide encouragement. This model of guided independent reading has been shown to accelerate student reading ability and improve student motivation to read in a number of research studies (Husman, Brem, & Duggan, 2005; Paul, 2003; Sadusky & Brem, 2002; Samuels & Wu, 2004).

Direct strategy instruction. Struggling readers are classified as such because they have not been as successful at developing reading strategies as their peers. The findings of the *Reading Next* report and of numerous other studies suggest that it is essential for adolescent struggling readers to receive explicit instruction and modeling of comprehension strategies such as

questioning, searching, summarizing, using graphic organizers, comprehension monitoring, and critical evaluation (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996; Gertsen & Carnine, 1986; Pressley, 2000; Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991). Engagement can be fostered by students' belief in their own personal accomplishment in using such strategies to successfully comprehend a text (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Time to practice and apply reading strategies on their own, constructive feedback from instructors, and scaffolding can lead to the productive use of strategies and increase motivation to read (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Wood, Willoughby, & Woloshyn, 1995). Direct strategy instruction, scaffolding, and guided independent reading are all integral to *Read Now Power Up!*. The program uses a multiple strategy approach to reading comprehension that is anchored in research. Techniques include Think-Along questions, metacognition and comprehension monitoring, and reciprocal teaching. For more information on comprehension strategies, refer to pages 6–8.

Student collaboration. When students work together to learn in collaborative pairs, teams, or larger groups, it can result in a positive effect on students' motivation and engagement. A sense of belonging (Anderman, 1999) as well as an increase in knowledge result from cooperative learning models (Englert, Tarrant, Mariage, & Oxer, 1994; Nichols & Miller, 1994; Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002) The *Reading Next* report suggests that learning is decentralized in cooperative groups because the meaning of a text is negotiated by the group or pair, relieving the burden of required success from the individual and simultaneously empowering the individual through the group's success (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). In *Read Now Power Up!* classes, students engage in a variety of collaborative learning activities in addition to teacher-led activities for whole and small groups and independent work. A typical class will involve student-led small groups/teams and Duolog paired reading opportunities (where a student is paired as a tutee with a stronger student or other who serves as tutor). When working in teams or small groups, all students are held accountable by being given roles and responsibilities, and each team/group has a specific goal.

Comprehension

Reading researchers such as Durkin (1993), as well as the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the *Reading Next* report (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) view comprehension as essential not only for academic learning but for lifelong learning as well. Comprehension is a stumbling block for many students in the middle grades that are struggling to read proficiently. Effective instruction in reading comprehension helps students become more active, purposeful, and conscious of their reading experience and thus assume more control of their comprehension. Text comprehension can be improved by teaching students to become strategic readers through explicit and direct instruction of techniques that help readers to correctly choose and apply specific comprehension strategies while reading text independently (Dole et al., 1996; Paris & Paris, 2001; Stevens et al., 1991).

Put Reading First, a summary of the National Reading Panel's findings (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborne, 2001), reports that the consensus from researchers on comprehension instruction identifies six techniques that are effective in helping students successfully learn and implement comprehension strategies. *Read Now Power Up!* employs each of these techniques. All techniques are directly explained and modeled by the instructor and then are repeatedly practiced by students until they become habit. Following is a summary of the techniques, followed by a description of how they work in the program.

Monitoring comprehension. Students need to develop an awareness of their success or difficulty in comprehending text. This awareness, often referred to as metacognition, will help them resolve problems as they read. Dole et al. (1996) found that at-risk students who received explicit instruction designed to promote self-regulation of strategy use during text comprehension significantly outperformed students not receiving such instruction on post reading tests when asked to read passages independently. *Read Now Power Up!* uses a proven technique called Think Along, developed by Dr. Roger Farr, which is designed to foster comprehension-monitoring skills. Explicit instruction in think-aloud techniques has been shown to be effective for enhancing comprehension-monitoring ability (Baumann, Seifert-

Kessell, & Jones, 1992). Think-Along icons and questions are embedded within the program's paperback books, prompting students to pause to think critically as they read.

Using graphic and semantic organizers. Most students are visual learners, and therefore, utilizing graphic organizer techniques (such as creating charts, graphs, and semantic maps) can be an effective method for helping students identify important narrative elements of a story (Baumann, 1984; Baumann & Bergeron, 1993) and to improve learning from informational texts within content areas (Armbruster, Anderson, & Meyer, 1991, 1992). The consensus among the findings of research studies in this area is the strength of the graphic organizer paradigm is that it can help to improve the memory and recall of text that has been read (see Berkowitz, 1986, as an example). The National Reading Panel concluded that better memory for what is read may transfer to improved comprehension ability of content-area text, which for older students is integral to their overall academic success as they shift to using reading to gain knowledge. *Read Now Power Up!* includes many lessons that feature graphic organizers in a variety of different contexts. These lessons provide students with multiple opportunities to learn how to use and apply graphic organizer techniques with the ultimate goal being to transfer this technique to their independent reading and writing.

Generating and Answering Questions. As evidenced from a meta-analysis of the reading research literature (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996), and further validated by the National Reading Panel report (NICHD, 2000), practice in asking and responding to questions about text during the act of reading helps students learn and comprehend more as they read. Generating and answering questions improves the active processing and comprehension of text, which helps students become strategic readers and learn to integrate and summarize ideas across text. When students are prompted (and later learn to prompt themselves) to actively think while they read, comprehension can improve. The Think-Along prompts embedded within the *Read Now Power Up!* books provide students with a model of how to ask questions and monitor comprehension while reading. The Teacher's Edition provides sample responses to the Think-Along questions and suggests ways teachers can

use student responses to help coach strategic reading, including having students generate and provide answers for their own questions.

Recognizing story structure. Recognizing and utilizing the structure of a story can lead to a greater appreciation, understanding, and memory for what has been read. Knowing that a story is made up of consistent episodic events (such as declaration of the setting), and being able to locate those events within a story as one reads, can help a reader to better recall what has been read, infer causal relationships, and interrelate events within a story. This allows a reader to develop coherence within the text and promotes deeper understanding. Research has shown that training students to utilize this technique during reading can improve comprehension (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Buss, Ratliff, & Irion, 1985; Spiegel & Fitzgerald, 1986), especially for lower level readers (NICHD, 2000; Short & Ryan, 1984). Several of the specific comprehension strategies taught within the context of the *Read Now Power Up!* paperback books deal with story structure, including recognizing sequence, identifying main idea and details, and identifying cause and effect. In addition, one fiction-specific reading strategy is taught in each narrative book—either understanding story plot, setting, characters, or theme. Prior to reading each paperback, students complete an activity in their Workout Books that introduces or reinforces the comprehension strategy being emphasized. As students read the paperbacks, many of the Think-Along questions and ideas for teachers in the Teacher’s Edition reinforce this strategy.

Summarizing. Summarizing helps students identify main ideas, eliminate unnecessary or redundant information, and recall what has been read. Training a student how to summarize efficiently has been shown to be effective. Students are able to create higher quality summaries (Bean & Steenwyk, 1984), recall more information (Rinehart, Stahl, & Erickson), and comprehend text better (Armbruster et al., 1987; Jenkins, Heliotis, Stein, & Haynes, 1987; Taylor & Beach, 1984). *Read Now Power Up!* provides many opportunities for students to learn and apply summarization skills. Writing activities prompt students to summarize their personal experiences, and end-of-book comprehension quizzes focus on main ideas. Think-Along questions found throughout the paperbacks and Workout Book exercises also provide good opportunities to practice summarization.

Read Now Power Up! uses all of the techniques outlined above to teach comprehension strategies across all levels of the program. Each paperback book targets one of the following comprehension strategies, which correlate to most standardized tests and national standards:

- Making Predictions
- Recognizing Sequence
- Identifying Main Idea and Details
- Identifying Fact and Opinion
- Comparing and Contrasting
- Identifying Cause and Effect
- Making Inferences/Drawing Conclusions
- Recognizing Author’s Viewpoint and Purpose

The *Read Now Power Up!* paperbacks are presented in fiction/nonfiction pairs so that students learn these strategies in both types of text, thus helping them transition from reading narrative to expository texts. In addition, depending on whether the book is fiction or nonfiction, one fiction-/nonfiction-specific reading strategy is taught in each paperback. Students learn how to effectively use the elements characteristic to each type of text to help promote better comprehension. Included below are examples for each type of text:

Nonfiction strategies:

- Using headers and subheaders to guide reading
- Using informational text features (including table of contents, index, and glossary)
- Interpreting pictures, graphs, and charts
- Using research skills and strategies to extend a topic

Fiction strategies:

- Understanding story plot
- Understanding setting
- Understanding characters
- Understanding theme

Before reading each paperback, students complete a strategy activity in their Workout Books. Each activity features a sample passage introducing that book’s vocabulary words and asks students to apply the targeted comprehension strategy. The Teacher’s Edition includes suggestions for reinforcing the strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, setting a purpose for reading,

and reciprocal teaching. After reading each book, students take computerized quizzes that provide valuable, immediate feedback on reading skills and vocabulary learned. Comprehension quizzes are also taken following each chapter read. These quizzes provide both the teacher and student with immediate feedback on how well students understand what they read. The software tracks and reports on the quantity and quality (quiz score performance) of student reading over time, making it easy for teachers to monitor progress.

Decoding/Phonics Instruction

Although it is often presumed that by the secondary grades students are skilled decoders, many struggling readers have a deficiency in word recognition ability that has persisted since elementary school (Peterson et al., 2000). Poor decoding can lead to problems in fluency and comprehension of text that can be academically detrimental to students who are expected to read to gain knowledge. Explicit instruction in skills that promote efficient decoding ability such as phonics has been shown to be effective even for students at the secondary level (Gaskins, Cuncelli, & Satlow, 1992; Lenz & Hughes, 1990; Lewkowicz, 1985; Meyer, 1982). Students at this age need extended time or practice in decoding and spelling that includes work with multisyllabic words or those words that are exceptions to the English spelling/sound conventions (Henry, 1993).

Read Now Power Up! embeds instruction in phonics skills within meaningful and appealing context. In the Level 1 and 2 Workout Books, phonics activities related to the paperbacks help students better understand and apply letter–sound relationships. Suggestions for reteaching targeted phonics skills to students having difficulty are included in the Teacher’s Editions. Web-based decoding activities give students additional practice with letter–sound relationships. Students may also listen as the paperbacks are read aloud from the CD-ROMs or audiocassettes to help foster decoding skills.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read quickly and accurately with phrasing that sounds natural. Fluent readers automatically recognize words and organize them into meaningful groups. However, skilled and accurate word recognition

alone is not enough to lead to fluency; it must become automatic (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). Fluency provides the bridge between word recognition and comprehension making it essential for skilled reading ability (Armbruster et al., 2001). Furthermore, when the burden of labored word recognition is removed a reader can devote more cognitive processing to comprehending text (Samuels, 1979). There is consensus among researchers that fluency can be improved when students are exposed to modeled fluent reading (Rasinski, 1990) and then are given frequent opportunities to practice (Curtis, 2004; Dowhower, 1987; Reitsma, 1988). Research has shown that when fluency improves, comprehension of text improves as well (Dowhower, 1987; Koskinen & Blum, 1986; O’Shea, Sindelar, & O’Shea, 1985). Struggling readers at the secondary level may lack fluency skills (Mathes, Simmons, & Davis, 1992); however, research has shown that fluency practice can be beneficial at this level (Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993).

Many instructional techniques can be used to promote fluency and have been found to be effective. Modeling, repeated oral reading, and assisted-reading are among the more effective and popular fluency techniques used in classrooms. Teachers can provide a model of fluent reading by reading aloud to students and asking them to pay attention not only to what is being read, but how it is being read—the rhythm and expression of written language. Research shows that students should read and reread a selection of text aloud a certain number of times or until a desired level of fluency is achieved (Dowhower, 1987; Samuels, 1979, 1994) and that assessing students’ fluency regularly will help to ensure that they are making adequate progress (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1992; Rasinski, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Read Now Power Up! incorporates each of these proven strategies. Reading aloud is a key component of the program and is part of each lesson. Using read-aloud strategies recommended by Trelease (2001), teachers model fluent reading for the whole class and employ methods to ensure students are active listeners and participants during this activity. Students may also follow along while listening to the cassette, CD-ROM, or online versions of the paperbacks for an another modeled-reading opportunity.

The fluency practice and assessment provided through

Read Now Power Up! is based on Renaissance Learning's Fluent Reader software. This program has proven successful at raising student's oral reading achievement under experimental conditions for both native-English-speaking and ELL students (Palumbo, 2004; Willcutt, 2004). After students have read and taken a quiz for the first chapter of each paperback book, they go to the computer and choose a passage pulled directly from that paperback to read aloud for one minute. This furthers students' comprehension by allowing them to have established prior knowledge before attempting to read the passage. The software records their oral reading and calculates their initial words-per-minute (wpm) rate. Then students listen to modeled readings of that same passage and record their own practices, with the objective being to read the passage within a words-per-minute goal determined by their teacher. Teachers may choose to involve other students through the use of choral readings, having a partner listen to the recording and deciding if it sounds fluent enough, or by pairing students with stronger readers to take turns reading aloud. The interactive nature of this process has the added benefit of keeping students engaged.

For maximum growth in fluency, students are encouraged to listen to each modeled reading and practice reading it aloud at least three times. After every timed practice, the program will recalculate a new wpm rate and display a graph showing the student's fluency progress over time. This knowledge can be used to monitor fluency growth relative to targets set by the teacher. When students believe their practiced readings sound as smooth and natural as the modeled reading, and they have reached their wpm goal, they submit the recording to their teacher and are prompted to take a short, two-question quiz to ensure that they understand the passage they've read.

Vocabulary

Following a review of the research, the National Reading Panel concluded that reading vocabulary is integral to the comprehension process of a skilled reader (NICHD, 2000). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students will not be able to develop good comprehension skills (Biemiller, 2003; Nagy, 1988). Teaching text-specific vocabulary has been shown to facilitate the reading of more difficult text (Medo & Ryder, 1993) and lead to an increase in text comprehension (Beck, Perfetti, &

McKeown, 1982; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986; Wixon, 1986). Although vocabulary building is sometimes considered a low-level activity, students in the middle and high school grades, regardless of reading ability, can benefit from vocabulary instruction (Graves, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Riggs & Gil-Garcia, 2001).

Vocabulary is acquired both indirectly through daily experience with oral and written language (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Stahl, Richek, & Vandevier, 1991) and directly through direct instruction (Dole, Sloan, & Trather, 1995; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990). Effective direct instruction involves not only providing specific word instruction (Brett, Rothlein, & Hurley, 1996), especially when words are key to passage comprehension (Tierney & Cunningham, 1984), but also equipping students with strategies to figure out unfamiliar words for themselves (Funkkink & de Glopper, 1998; Riggs & Gil-Garcia, 2001).

Read Now Power Up! utilizes both methods of direct vocabulary instruction. New vocabulary words are pretaught prior to reading. The words selected for preteaching are both above-level and integral to the story. Vocabulary words are first introduced in the reading strategy activity, where they are printed in bold. Next, students complete a Vocabulary Builder activity in their Workout Books, then discuss the activity with either the teacher or in groups of students. As teachers read the first chapter of each paperback aloud and students follow along in the reprinted version in their Workout Books, vocabulary words are again in bold and are listed and defined at the bottom of the page. The Teacher's Edition also includes suggestions for introducing vocabulary words and includes additional blackline master activities for students to complete during independent activity time. After students read and take a quiz for the first chapter of each paperback, they are able to begin working on the program's fluency passages, many of which include vocabulary words.

Because it is neither feasible nor desirable for instructors to pre-teach all the words students might be unfamiliar with, it is also important to teach word identification strategies so students can begin to understand words on their own. Word strategy activities are included for each paperback book in the student Workout Books. Proven strategies such as using knowledge of prefixes and

suffixes, understanding compound words, and recognizing synonyms and antonyms are presented and practiced, using contexts that are related thematically or topically to the text students read.

According to Stahl and Fairbanks (1986), words are learned incrementally over multiple exposures, and 12 encounters with a word improves reading comprehension. *Read Now Power Up!* provides students with 10 to 11 formal exposures to each vocabulary word and one to two additional exposures via targeted independent reading.

Student's vocabulary development is monitored not only by teacher review of the vocabulary Workout Book exercises but by short, computerized vocabulary quizzes. Performance on the vocabulary quizzes is stored in a database and generated in a variety of reports that teachers can use to track progress over time and determine when words need to be retaught. Students may also access this feedback in the software where they can view lists of words they have learned and missed. Power Reading vocabulary quizzes also include an option for students to retake quizzes comprised of words they have missed.

Connecting Reading and Writing

Following a review of the research, the National Reading Panel concluded that reading and writing are neither distinct nor separable; they should be taught in tandem. Writing impacts learning in general, and reading comprehension specifically, by requiring students to organize and clarify their thoughts and think about the ideas encountered while reading (National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, 1996; Vacca & Vacca, 1996). Writing should be embedded in and connected to authentic reading tasks (Paris et al., 1992), which will allow students to directly apply their knowledge of language structure and conventions to create, critique, and discuss texts. The *Reading Next* report also recommends that struggling readers at the secondary level engage in intensive writing practice focusing especially on the type of writing that will be important for high school and beyond. Because reading and writing are inherently linked, practicing writing can reinforce the skills that are also important in reading, such as grammar and spelling, and help

struggling students read like writers and write like readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

Read Now Power Up! builds the reading/writing connection in many ways and during different phases of students' interaction with text. After reading a chapter selection in their Workout Books, students have the opportunity to develop ideas into a written response that:

- Extends thinking about the text
- Forges new connections between the text and their own lives
- Engages students in a variety of writing types to reinforce their familiarity with text structures
 - informational essays
 - instructions
 - narratives
 - persuasive essays
 - letters
 - speeches
 - summaries
 - reviews

Graphic organizers, writing frameworks, models, and other supports aid students throughout the writing process, helping them to generate and organize ideas and improve their reading and writing skills. First, a prewriting activity that features graphic organizers and related questions helps students generate ideas for the writing task. Next, a writing plan helps students further develop and organize ideas into a framework for the targeted writing type, paving the way toward a first draft. Additionally, the Teacher's Edition provides models for both the prewriting and planning activities that can be shared with students or used as a reference. It also includes suggestions for how to facilitate the writing process and a scoring rubric for each paperback book's writing activity.

The Teacher's Resource binders include additional blackline master writing activities and planning aids that are to be used when students complete a book, similar to those in the Workout Books. Also included is a writing checklist of specific criteria that gives students an opportunity for self-reflection and assessment.

Time, Support, and Feedback for Reading Practice

Struggling readers need time and support to practice the reading strategies they encounter in class. It is only

through frequent, extended reading practice that students develop fluency skills that go beyond accuracy of recognition to automaticity of recognition (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The International Reading Association and the authors of the *Reading Next* report take the position that dedicated and extended time for reading is a critical but often overlooked factor in adolescent reading success in general (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore et al., 1999). Providing extended time for students to practice reading not only promotes fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge (Pressley, 2000), it gives students the opportunity to practice comprehension strategies that have been modeled during instruction.

However, reading practice that is conducted without guidance or feedback has not been shown to improve reading ability (Byrnes, 2000; Peterson et al., 2000). A critical component of *Read Now Power Up!* is daily, guided independent reading practice—in-class reading practice during which the teacher guides students to books at appropriate levels (the paperback books that are a part of the program and/or library books selected by the student), closely monitors student progress, and intervenes with instruction when necessary.

The *Reading Next* report emphasizes the importance of ongoing formative and summative assessment for struggling secondary students to help ensure that students' progress is consistently monitored and evaluated to keep students on track (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Feedback is also generated automatically when students take end-of-chapter and end-of-book comprehension quizzes, vocabulary quizzes, fluency quizzes, and a periodic reading achievement test (STAR Reading). Because quiz results are provided instantly, students immediately know how they scored and which items were incorrect. All quiz and STAR Reading results are stored in the program's online database, which can easily be configured to generate results at student, class, and school levels for any period of time. At any given time, teachers and administrators can see how much students are reading, and how well they are performing on the various assessments. The progress-monitoring technology included with *Read Now Power Up!* is based on Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader software, which provides instant motivational feedback to students on material they have read (Sadusky & Brem, 2002; Husman et al., 2005; Samuels & Wu, 2004).

In addition to the computerized assessments, many activities that are built into the *Read Now Power Up!* lessons—classroom discussions, small-group activities, and Workout Book exercises—also provide teachers considerable opportunities to monitor student progress.

For guided independent reading to be effective, students must read books that are both interesting and at an appropriate level. The paperback books used in *Read Now Power Up!* are carefully leveled to ensure that they are challenging yet not frustrating for struggling, middle-level students.

As mentioned, the program also strongly encourages students to choose library books to read independently for further practice. *Read Now Power Up!* facilitates this through a computerized search feature that allows students to search for books using various criteria, including keyword, topic, theme, subject, reading level, and author. This tool helps students select library books at appropriate levels, while being flexible enough to take into consideration student interests and teacher judgment.

Matching students to their correct readability level is accomplished through STAR Reading (Renaissance Learning, 2005), a computer-adaptive assessment. Students complete STAR Reading in about 10 minutes, and the software immediately produces a wide variety of reliable and valid scores including Grade Equivalent, Scaled Score, National Percentile Rank, and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). A student's ZPD score defines the readability range of books suggested for that student. The ZPD ranges are based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), who found that students learn best when the concepts are neither too easy nor beyond their current learning capacity. The readability ranges that help guide students to appropriate books were developed through an analysis of the book-reading behavior of more than 80,000 students. These ranges are guidelines rather than absolute rules, therefore teachers and librarians are encouraged to use their professional judgment and take into account student motivation and interest when helping students select library books (Renaissance Learning, 1999). Also included in *Read Now Power Up!* is access to quizzes for more than 100,000 fiction and nonfiction titles. Although the library books may be read during independent reading time in or outside of class, all quizzes are monitored by a teacher and must be completed at school.

Evidence for Components of Read Now Power Up!

As mentioned previously, the program combines elements of two existing interventions—Steck Vaughn’s *Power Up! Building Reading Strength*, and Renaissance Learning’s Read Now. Studies documenting the effectiveness of the separate components are summarized below. Because *Read Now Power Up!* was released in late 2005, results of studies on the combination of the two components are expected to be available in 2007.

Algozzine (2004) conducted an independent, quasi-experimental study comparing a group of struggling readers using Read Now with students that had similar demographic characteristics and reading abilities. A total of 238 students in grades six through eight were included in the study. Significant gains were observed for treatment (Read Now) students between pretest and posttest, while no improvements were evident for control group students. Figure 1 compares Normal Curve Equivalent gains on the computer-adaptive, norm-referenced STAR Reading assessment for both groups.

The study concluded that students using Read Now made impressive gains measured against control students, demonstrating effect sizes of between 0.35 and 0.40 over a relatively short period of time (12 weeks).

A study by the Educational Research Institute of America (2003) investigated the efficacy of the *Power Up!* program in middle school through a quasi-experimental pretest/posttest design. A total of 208 grade 6, 7, and 8 students from nine schools participated in the study. Most of the students were described by their teachers as reading two or more years below their current grade level. The results indicated that students using *Power Up!* generally met or exceeded the performance gains on the SAT-9 assessment in comprehension, vocabulary, and total reading compared with expected gains based on national norms. At each grade level, the SAT-9 gain on Total Reading Score significantly increased from pre- to posttest ($p < .01$). The difference between the scale scores from pre- to posttest translated into grade-equivalent increases that were higher than would be normally expected (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Evidence of Reading Skill (Normal Curve Equivalent) Improvements for Read Now Users

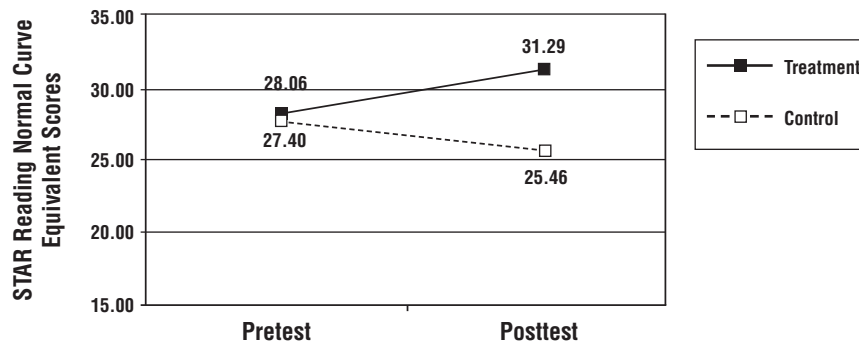
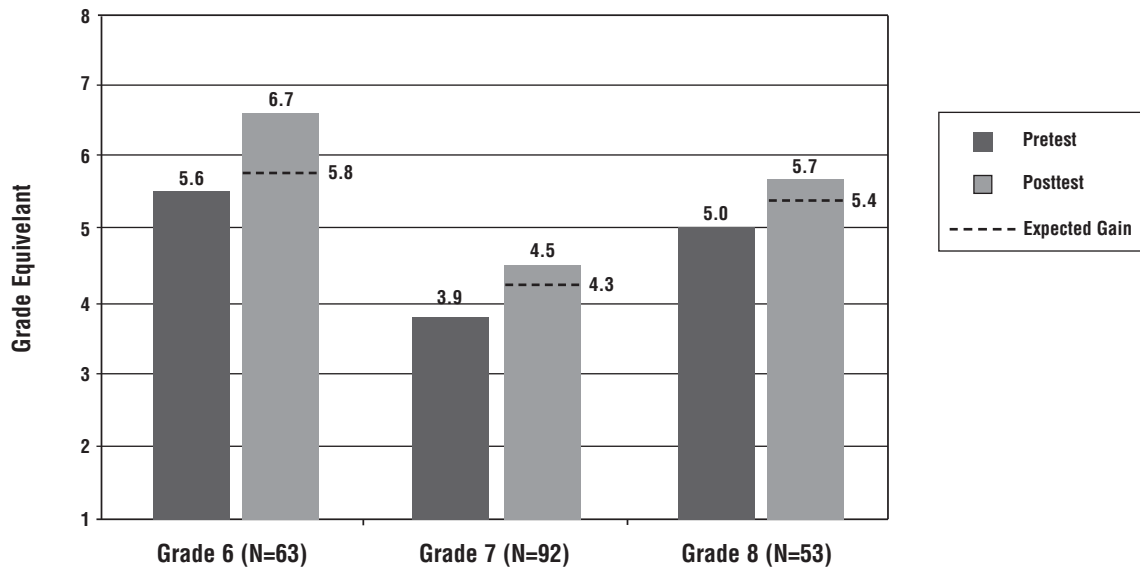


Figure 2. *Power Up! Building Reading Strength: Actual vs. Expected Achievement Gains Based on SAT 9 Total Reading Scores*



All results significant at the 99% confidence level.

Summary

Nationally, a large number of students—an estimated 36% of fourth graders and 27% of eighth graders—do not read at a proficient level, putting them at great risk for school failure. Longitudinal studies have concluded that reading difficulties persist without targeted intervention. *Read Now Power Up!* is such an intervention; it is designed to help struggling readers in grades 5 through 9 become successful readers by providing them with an instructional program that is founded on extensive research. It combines explicit instruction, advanced progress-monitoring assessment technology, and high-interest reading materials.

Comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonics, phonemic awareness, and the reading–writing connection are taught and practiced through small-group instruction, whole-group activities, and guided independent reading practice. The program uses an instructional scaffolding approach, in which teachers introduce and model new strategies, and then have students practice those

strategies independently and in small groups. The materials used in the program are in varied formats—paperback books, student workbooks, CD-ROMs, audiocassettes, and Web/computer-based activities and assessments—providing students with a variety of ways to practice and self-monitor their reading practice.

Read Now Power Up! is a teacher-centered program that provides flexibility for teachers to use daily and periodic progress-monitoring results to adjust and personalize instruction as necessary. Although technology plays a large role in the program, it does not replace the teacher, nor does it deliver instruction. Rather, it is used to reinforce strategies and provide teachers with accurate progress-monitoring data in a timely fashion.

Although *Read Now Power Up!* is a relatively new program, it combines the best elements of two existing interventions for struggling readers that have demonstrated success in boosting reading achievement for middle-school students reading below grade level.

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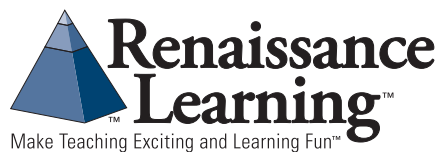
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