1

Teaching Children to Read

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CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, we will

- discuss the critical areas of teaching reading as identified by the National Reading Panel;
- describe what research tells us about reading problems and remediations; and
- identify culturally responsive reading approaches.

DO NOT ASSUME A STUDENT HAS A READING PROBLEM UNLESS YOU HAVE TAUGHT READING!

Ms. Jones has been teaching kindergarten students for more than 18 years. She was known as an excellent teacher in the school and had garnered support from parents, teachers, and principals. The interesting thing here was that Ms. Jones, parents, teachers, and principals were all Anglo-Americans. Ms. Jones had two culturally diverse students in

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her class, one Latino named Joe and one African American named Chidi. Joe's parents moved to the town to work in the beef factory, and Chidi's parents moved to the town to work at the university. Meanwhile, Chidi was complaining that Ms. Jones never paid attention to him and how he hated going to school. He observed that Joe was also not called upon in class. Chidi's parents tried to complain to the principal, who indicated that they did not have to worry because Ms. Jones was an experienced teacher with more than 18 years of experience.

During the first parent/teacher meeting, Ms. Jones noted that she was beginning to teach reading. As she noted: "Right now, I am teaching alphabets and word association, that is a *for* apple, b *for* ball, c *for* cat, d *for* dog, *and so on." She added that Chidi was quiet and withdrawn and "that was a red flag for students with reading, learning, and behavior problems." Chidi's parents were shocked that their child, who could read at a second- or third-grade level, was viewed as having reading problems. Additionally, this child was quiet in class because he was brought up to focus on tasks such as schooling. They asked Ms. Jones if she had any book for second or third graders, and she gave them the book. Right there, they asked Chidi to read, and he read fluently and superbly. They wanted to know why she had assumed that their son could not read. She never apologized. When the case was brought to the principal, she expressed surprise and continued to indicate that Ms. Jones was an excellent teacher. Chidi's parents had no option but to move Chidi to a new school, where they felt that his needs might be adequately met. The critical question continued to be "How could a teacher make assumptions about reading deficiency when she had never taught reading?"*

When questions arise about how best to teach reading and focus on early literacy, the first instinct of many professionals is to make assumptions about reading and reading deficiency. They sometimes do not teach reading before making reading assumptions. But there are proven ways to teach reading or discover any reading deficiency. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five critical areas on which general and special educators must focus. In its report, the group responded to a Congressional mandate to help parents, teachers, and policy makers address the key skills and areas central to effective reading instruction and achievement: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

- *Phonemic awareness* means understanding that sounds make words. It is a subcategory of phonological development, which includes other skills such as identifying and manipulating phonemes, syllables, onsets, rimes, and words, as well as other aspects of sound such as rhyming, alliteration, and tone. Phonemic awareness is not phonics.
- *Phonics* means understanding the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It teaches children to decode these relationships to read and write words fluently.
- *Fluency* means reading accurately and quickly with expression. Fluent readers recognize words automatically.
- *Vocabulary* means understanding that words have meanings and that knowing the meaning of new words is important for reading

higher levels of text. Because it is difficult for children to understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean, vocabulary is critical for comprehension.
- *Comprehension* means understanding what one has read.

TEACHING EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

Teachers in sound and effective literacy programs teach these skills and regularly assess their children's development of them. In *Putting Reading First,* Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborne (2003) summarized what researchers have discovered about how to teach each of these skills successfully. Using the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), they defined each area, reviewed research supporting it, summarized classroom implications, described teaching strategies, and addressed frequently asked questions. In this chapter, we summarize their work as a basis for the content we have included in our book. We also provide an overview of effective teaching and introduce the foundations of culturally responsive teaching to support the use of effective early literacy instruction for learners from diverse backgrounds.

Teaching Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the skill of using the individual sounds in spoken words. Before learning to read, children must understand how the sounds in words work. Phonemic awareness is essential for them to do this. Phonemes are the smallest part of sound in a spoken word making a difference in the word's meaning (Flint, 2008; Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, 2005). Children can show that they have phonemic awareness in several ways, including recognizing which words in a set of words begin with the same sound, isolating and saying the first or last sound in a word, combining or blending the separate sounds in a word to say the word, and breaking, or segmenting, a word into its separate sounds.

Often, phonemic awareness is confused with phonics. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words, while phonics is the understanding that a predictable relationship exists between phonemes and graphemes, the letters that represent sounds in written language (Hoosain & Salili, 2005; Lee, 2005). Another misconception is that phonemic awareness has the same meaning as phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness. The focus of phonological awareness includes identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language while also encompassing awareness of other aspects of sound. Children can show that they have phonological awareness by identifying and making oral rhymes, identifying and working with syllables in spoken words, identifying and working with onsets and rimes in spoken syllables or one-syllable words, and identifying and working with individual phonemes in spoken words.

What Does Research Tell Us About Phonemic Awareness Instruction?

Teachers can teach phonemic awareness, and children can learn it using a variety of instructional activities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- *Phoneme isolation:* Having children recognize individual sounds in a word
- *Phoneme identity:* Having children recognize the same sounds in different words
- *Phoneme categorization:* Having children recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has the "odd" sound
- *Phoneme blending:* Having children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, combining the phonemes to form a word, and then writing the word
- *Phoneme segmentation:* Having children break the word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it, and then writing the word
- *Phonemic detection:* Having children recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word
- *Phoneme addition:* Having children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word
- *Phoneme substitution:* Having children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word

Phonemic awareness instruction improves children's ability to read words, helps children learn to spell by helping them segment words into phonemes, and improves their reading comprehension. Some common vocabulary used in research addressing phonemic awareness includes the following:

- *Phoneme manipulation:* When children work with phonemes in words
- *Blending:* When children combine individual phonemes to form words
- *Segmenting (or segmentation):* When children break words into their individual phonemes

Phonemic awareness instruction provides a stronger contribution to the effectiveness of reading and spelling when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet and when it focuses on one or two types of phoneme manipulation rather than several types.

Keys for Teaching Phonemic Awareness

All children can profit from phonemic awareness instruction regardless of their current literacy level. Of course, it is important to provide them with instruction that is appropriate for their level of development. Teaching one or two types of phoneme manipulation is generally more effective than teaching many types of manipulation.

It is not necessary to devote a significant amount of class time to phonemic awareness instruction; however, children will differ in their levels of phonemic awareness, and some will need more instruction than others.

Similarly, small-group instruction may be more effective than individual or whole-group instruction, because children often benefit from listening to their classmates respond and receive feedback from the teacher. Frequent and ongoing assessment is the best way to identify students who will require more instruction and those who should be taught other early literacy skills (Flood & Anders, 2005; Hoosain & Salili, 2005; Lee, 2005).

Teaching Phonics

Learning the relationships between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language and learning to use these relationships to read and write words are the goals and benefits of teaching phonics. Professionals use different labels to describe these relationships, including the following:

- Graphophonemic relationships
- Letter-sound associations
- Letter-sound correspondences
- Sound-symbol correspondences
- Sound-spellings

Some professionals argue that English spellings are too irregular for phonics instruction to help children learn to read words. A goal of phonics instruction is to teach children a system for sounding out words when regular rules apply to them.

What Does Research Tell Us About Phonics Instruction?

Scientific research on phonics instruction indicates that systematic and explicit teaching produces a stronger contribution to children's growth in reading when compared with teaching that provides nonsystematic or no phonics instruction (Flint, 2008). Programs of systematic phonics instruction involve the direct teaching of a set of letter-sound relationships in a clearly defined sequence. In addition, these programs provide materials that give children significant practice in applying knowledge of these relationships as they read and write. The many approaches to phonics instruction include the following:

- Synthetic phonics
- Analytic phonics
- Analogy-based phonics
- Phonics through spelling
- Embedded phonics
- Onset-rime phonics instruction

Systematic phonics instruction is most beneficial for children's reading achievement when it begins in kindergarten or first grade. Beginning systematic phonics instruction early results in enhanced growth in children's ability to comprehend what they read rather than nonsystematic or no phonics instruction, and it is beneficial to children regardless of their socioeconomic status or cultural and linguistic background. Programs of

systematic and explicit phonics instruction provides practice with letter-sound relationships in a predetermined sequence, helping children learn to use these relationships to decode words that contain them. In addition to phonics instruction, young children should be solidifying their knowledge of the alphabet, engaging in phonemic awareness activities, and listening to stories and informational texts read aloud to them (Flint, 2008; Manzo et al., 2005). Further, they should be reading texts and writing letters, words, messages, and stories.

Keys to Teaching Phonics

A program of systematic phonics instruction identifies a purposefully selected set of letter-sound relationships, which then organizes the introduction of these relationships into a consistent instructional sequence. Nonsystematic programs of phonics instruction are not effective because they are not organized, do not teach consonant and vowel letter-sound relationships in a predetermined sequence, and do not provide practice materials focused on helping children apply what they are learning about letter-sound relationships. Effective programs of phonics instruction help teachers explicitly and systematically instruct students in how to relate letters and sounds; help students apply their knowledge of phonics as they read and to their own writing; can be adapted to the needs of individual students; and include alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and the reading of text.

Phonics is effective when taught to the whole class, to small groups, or to individual students. The needs of the students determine how effectively to deliver instruction. Nonsystematic approaches to phonics instruction that should be avoided include these:

- *Literature-based programs* that emphasize reading and writing activities
- *Basal reading programs* that focus on whole word or meaning-based activities
- *Sight-word programs* that begin by teaching children a sight word reading vocabulary of 50–100 words

Systematic phonics instruction helps children learn to identify words that increase their reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It contributes to growth in the reading of most children, and it produces more growth in spelling among kindergarten and first-grade students than nonsystematic or no phonics programs. Systematic phonics instruction alone may not be sufficient to improve the overall reading and spelling performance of readers beyond first grade, and attention to fluency and other areas of reading must be part of a comprehensive approach to teaching early literacy skills.

Teaching Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly with appropriate expression. Fluency provides a link between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers are able to recognize words and comprehend at the same time, whereas less fluent readers concentrate on figuring

out the words, leaving them little attention for comprehending the text. Apparently, fluency develops gradually and requires substantial practice. As students are first learning to read, their oral reading is slow and labored because they are just learning to attach sounds to letters and to blend sounds into recognizable words. Once students are capable of recognizing many words automatically, their oral reading may still be less than fluent.

Readers must be able to divide the text into phrases and clauses to read with expression. It is essential that readers know how to pause appropriately within and at the ends of sentences and when to change emphasis and tone. Clearly, fluency changes depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text. Further, although some readers may recognize words automatically, they may not read the words fluently when the words appear in sentences. Therefore, it is essential that students receive instruction and practice in fluency as they read connected text (Flood & Anders, 2005; Hoosain & Salili, 2005).

What Does Research Tell Us About Fluency Instruction?

There are two major instructional approaches related to fluency: (1) repeated and monitored oral reading and (2) independent silent reading. Research indicates that students who practice repeated and monitored oral reading while receiving guidance and/or feedback become better readers. Repeated oral reading improves word recognition, speed, accuracy, and fluency and improves reading comprehension. Several effective techniques related to repeated oral reading have been established and validated through research. Research has not confirmed whether independent silent reading with minimal guidance or feedback improves reading achievement and fluency, nor has it proven that silent reading in the classroom does not work.

Keys to Effective Fluency Instruction

It is essential that you read aloud to your students daily, because listening to good models of fluent reading enables students to learn how a reader's voice can help written text make sense. Once you have modeled how to read the text, it is important that you have the students reread it and engage in repeated readings. As a rule, having students read a text four times is sufficient to improve fluency, but many teachers find that some students require many more trials before reading fluently. In addition, encourage parents and family members to read aloud to their children (Manzo et al., 2005; Utley, Obiakor, & Kozleski, 2005).

Students should practice orally rereading text that is relatively easy for them and at their appropriate level of reading. This is important because if students are reading text that is more difficult, then they will focus more on word recognition and decrease their opportunity to develop fluency. Students can practice orally rereading text in several ways, including the following:

- *Student-adult reading:* The student reads one-on-one with an adult.
- *Choral reading:* Students read along as a group with another fluent adult reader.

- *Tape-assisted reading:* Students read along in their books as they hear a fluent reader read the book on an audiotape.
- *Partner reading:* Paired students take turns reading aloud to each other.
- *Readers' theater:* Students rehearse and perform a play for peers or others.

Independent reading helps increase fluency and reading achievement, but it should not take the place of direct instruction in reading. Growth in reading fluency is greatest when students are working directly with teachers. Direct instruction is essential for readers who have not yet attained fluency. It is always helpful to encourage students to read outside of the classroom as well (Hannaway, 2005; Lee, 2005).

Teachers should regularly assess fluency formally and informally to ensure that students are benefiting from instruction. The most informal assessment involves listening to students read aloud and making a judgment on their progress in fluency. A general rule for formal assessment is that by third grade students should be able to read more than 90 words a minute and read with expression while also being able to comprehend what they are reading. Monitoring student progress in reading fluency is not only useful in evaluating instruction and setting instructional goals but can be motivating for students as their fluency and reading achievement progress.

Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. In general, there are two types of vocabulary: oral and reading. Oral vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. Reading vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print. Vocabulary plays an essential part in learning to read and is very important to reading comprehension. Researchers often refer to four types of vocabulary that help children build literacy skills:

- *Listening vocabulary:* Includes the words we need to know to understand what we hear
- *Speaking vocabulary:* Includes the words we use when we speak
- *Reading vocabulary:* Includes the words we need to know to understand what we read
- *Writing vocabulary:* Includes the words we use in writing

What Does Research Tell Us About Vocabulary Instruction?

According to scientific research, vocabulary instruction reveals that the meanings of many words are learned indirectly, while some meanings must be taught directly. Children learn word meanings indirectly in three ways:

- They engage in oral language.
- They listen to adults read to them.
- They read extensively on their own.

Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words that are not part of their everyday experiences. Direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text encourages better reading comprehension. Direct instruction

includes providing specific word instructions and teaching word-learning strategies to students. Specific word instruction provides the following important benefits:

- *Teaching specific words before reading* helps both vocabulary learning and reading comprehension.
- *Extended instruction* that promotes active engagement with vocabulary improves word learning.
- *Repeated exposure to vocabulary* in many contexts aids word learning.

Since it is impossible to provide specific instruction for all the words students do not know, it is essential that students be able to determine the meaning of words that are new to them but that have not been directly taught to them. Therefore, it is important that students develop effective word-learning strategies, such as these:

- How to use dictionaries and other resources to find the meaning of unfamiliar or unknown words
- How to use information about word parts to determine the meanings of words in texts and other reading material
- How to use context clues to figure out word meanings

Keys to Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Indirect learning of vocabulary can be encouraged in two ways: reading aloud to students while discussing the selection before, during, and after reading it and encouraging students to read extensively on their own. Since it is not possible to teach students all of the words in a text, it is better to focus on three types of words:

- *Important words,* or words that are essential for understanding a concept or the text
- *Useful words,* or words that students are likely to see and use consistently over time
- *Difficult words,* or words with multiple meanings and idiomatic expressions.

It is also important to remember that students know words to varying degrees, and they may display three levels of word knowledge:

- *Established:* The word is very familiar, and the student can recognize its meaning and use the word correctly.
- *Acquainted:* The word is somewhat familiar, and the student has some idea of its basic meaning.
- *Unknown:* The word and its meaning are completely unfamiliar.

They also learn vocabulary in different ways: learning a new meaning for a known word, learning the meaning for a new word representing a known concept, learning the meaning of a new word representing an unknown concept, and clarifying and enriching the meaning of a known word.

Effective teachers help students develop vocabulary by fostering *word consciousness,* which is awareness of and interest in words, their meanings, and their power. They do this by calling attention to the way authors

choose words to convey particular meanings, by encouraging students to engage in word play, by helping students research a word's origin, and by encouraging students to search for examples of a word's usage in their daily lives. Vocabulary is a building block for comprehension, and developing strong vocabulary skills in these ways supports reading for understanding, which is the ultimate goal of effective literacy instruction for all children (Flint, 2008; Flood & Anders, 2005; Hoosain & Salili, 2005).

Teaching Comprehension

Comprehension is the purpose of reading. Instruction in comprehension helps students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate effectively with others about what they read.

What Does Research Tell Us About Comprehension Instruction?

Comprehension strategies are sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of text. Following are six strategies that have a solid scientific basis for improving text comprehension:

- Monitoring comprehension
- Using graphic and semantic organizers
- Answering questions
- Generating questions
- Recognizing story structure
- Summarizing what has been read

Effective comprehension strategy instruction is explicit when teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include

- direct explanation,
- modeling,
- guided practice, and
- application.

Effective comprehension strategy instruction can be accomplished through cooperative learning, which involves students working together as partners or in small groups, where they work collectively to understand content-area texts and help each other learn and apply comprehension strategies. Apparently, effective instruction helps readers use comprehension strategies flexibly and in combination. Multiple-strategy instruction teaches students how to use strategies needed to assist their comprehension. In one example of multiple-strategy instruction, called "reciprocal teaching," the teacher and students work together so that the students learn four comprehension strategies: (1) *asking* questions about what they are reading, (2) *summarizing* parts of the text, (3) *clarifying* the words and sentences they do not understand, and (4) *predicting* what might occur next in the text.

Keys to Effective Comprehension Instruction

Text comprehension instruction can begin as early as primary grades to begin building the foundation for successful reading in content areas

later in school. Instruction at all grade levels can benefit students by showing them how reading is a process of making sense of text or constructing meaning ultimately leading to understanding and use of information presented in text. Comprehension strategies for the classroom make use of prior knowledge to improve students' understanding and use mental imagery help readers visualize and remember what they read. Comprehension strategies are a means of helping children understand what they are reading, and once they see this helps them to learn, they will be more likely to be motivated and actively involved in learning.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are key targets for teaching children to read. Implementing components of effective teaching (i.e., planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating) increases the likelihood of achieving success for all students. Culturally responsive teaching builds on these foundations to support teaching reading to children from diverse backgrounds (Obiakor, 2003, 2007; Utley et al., 2005).

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Teaching is the systematic presentation of content assumed necessary for mastery within a general area of knowledge (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Elliott, 1997). Effective teachers follow key principles. For example, according to Ornstein and Levine (1993), teachers are most effective when they do the following:

- Make sure that students know how they are expected to perform.
- Let students know how to obtain help.
- Follow through with reminders and rewards to enforce rules.
- Provide smooth transitions between activities.
- Give students assignments of sufficient variety to maintain interest.
- Monitor the class for signs of confusion or inattention.
- Use variations in eye contact, voice, and movement to maintain student attention.
- Use variations in academic activities to maintain student attention.
- Do not respond to discipline problems emotionally.
- Arrange the physical environment to complement instruction.
- Do not embarrass students in front of their classmates.
- Respond flexibly to unexpected developments. (p. 617)

These are just some of the ways in which effective teachers provide knowledge systematically. They are representative of four areas central to effective teaching: planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Algozzine et al., 1997).

Planning

If all children in a class were at the same instructional level and if the goals and objectives of schooling were clearly prescribed and the same for all children, then teaching would consist of doing the same things, in the same order, at the same time for everyone. Of course, not all children are

alike, and the goals and objectives of teaching are not the same for all of them. This is why planning is such an important part of effective teaching.

Planning involves making decisions about what content to present. It also means deciding how to present the content and how to communicate realistic expectations about it to students (Flint, 2008; Manzo et al., 2005). Planning instruction, then, involves three steps, each contributing to effective teaching of all children and any content: deciding what to teach, deciding how to teach it, and communicating realistic expectations (Obiakor, 2003, 2007).

Managing

Managing involves getting ready for teaching, using time productively, and creating a positive environment. Few of us are comfortable in chaos. We need order around us. Children, too, need an orderly environment in which to learn. They need rules to follow, they need an understanding of those rules and the consequences if they do not follow them, and they need to see that the rules are enforced. In addition to setting rules, getting ready for teaching involves deciding how to deal with disruptions.

Managing also means using time productively. For example, in well-managed classrooms, transitions between activities are brief; few interruptions break the flow of classroom activities; the instructional pace has an active, task-oriented focus; and sufficient time is allocated to academic activities.

Managing also means creating a positive environment because, students are more motivated to learn when teachers accept their individual differences; interact positively with them; and create a supportive, cooperative classroom atmosphere (Obiakor, 2003, 2007; Utley et al., 2005). Students feel better about school and about learning when their teachers manage their classrooms effectively. Delivering content is also easier when teachers effectively manage their classrooms and the activities going on there. Learning is more likely to occur in effectively managed instructional environments.

Delivering

The third component of effective instruction, delivering, involves presenting content, monitoring student learning, and adjusting instruction. A simple but effective model for teaching or delivering content involves four steps: demonstrate, demonstrate, practice, and prove.

Effective teachers present and demonstrate well-crafted lessons with objectives and measurable outcomes. They communicate the goals of their instruction, maintain attention during instruction, and make the content they are teaching relevant for the children they are teaching. They teach thinking skills so their students can apply what they are learning rather than just repeat back memorized facts. Additionally, they monitor children's learning and check for understanding by having children present, identify, say, or write responses before presenting new content. They provide supportive or corrective feedback so that children will know when their responses are correct and so that they will not practice wrong

responses when they are incorrect. To motivate their students, effective teachers show enthusiasm, assign work that interests students, use rewards and praise intermittently, and assign work at which students can succeed.

Effective teachers provide opportunities for students to work and practice independently to master content they have been learning. With relevant practice over adequate times, and with high levels of success, students complete tasks and perform skills automatically. Having students engage in extensive relevant practice is important, but if instructional materials are not varied, then practice becomes boring and interferes with instructional goals. Providing supportive or corrective feedback during independent practice is also important so that children will know when their responses are correct and so that they can correct wrong responses before they are asked to show and prove their levels of competence on classroom or standardized assessments.

Adjusting instruction includes varying approaches for presenting content. Not all students learn in the same way or at the same pace. Teachers must adjust their instruction for individual learners. There are no specific rules about how to modify lessons to meet all students' needs. The process usually is one of trial and error. Teachers try alternative approaches until one works.

An example: Mr. Cruise was teaching a lesson on the characteristics of dinosaurs. During the lesson, he noticed that Miguel was not paying attention. Another student, Anna, asked to go to the bathroom, and a third student started drumming on his desk with two pencils. It was clear to Mr. Cruise that the students were not interested in the lesson, so he modified it, assigning to each dinosaur the name of one of the students. He saved the most powerful, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, for the end of the lesson and named him "Mr. Cruise." He believed this slight change was enough to interest the students in the lesson, and he was right.

Teachers also adjust instruction by varying their methods and materials. This increases the chances of meeting individual students' needs. For students who are having difficulty, teachers can provide extra instruction and review, or they can adjust the pace of instruction (Obiakor & Smith, 2005; Utley et al., 2005).

Evaluating

Evaluation is the process by which teachers decide whether the methods and materials they are using are effective—based on students' performance. There are two kinds of evaluation: formative and summative. Both involve using data to make decisions. Formative evaluation occurs during the process of instruction. The teacher collects data during instruction and uses the data to make instructional decisions. Summative evaluation occurs at the end of instruction, when the teacher administers a test or formal assessment to determine whether the students have met instructional objectives. There are six components in the evaluation process:

- Monitoring students' understanding
- Monitoring engaged time
- Maintaining records of students' progress
- Informing students about their progress

- Using data to make decisions
- Making judgments about students' performance

Clearly, culturally responsive teachers use students' interests, experiences, and backgrounds to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Culturally responsive teachers consider students' interests, experiences, and backgrounds when planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating their teaching of these skills (Flint, 2008).

EFFECTIVE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

It is not easy to teach reading or literacy the right way and to be also culturally responsive at the same time. There is some multidimensionality involved! Flood and Anders (2005) presented the relationship between literacy and culture. They acknowledged that reading and literacy are connected to myriad issues, such as culture, race, geographical location, socioeconomics, and school policies. As Hannaway (2005) noted, we cannot talk about reading and literacy without talking about parent/family inputs, out-of-school experiences, in-school experiences, economic and social policies, education and social policies, testing and accountability policies, early childhood programs, teacher quality, class size, school resources, and afterschool programs. Why then do some general and special education professionals look at reading unidimensionally? Consider the following unidimensional statements about reading:

- If you cannot read, you will not survive in life.
- Your accent determines your reading ability.
- Good readers speak good English.
- You can predict if a student will have reading deficiency.
- Reading has no connection to socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- Reading can only be evaluated with standardized, conventional methods.

Clearly, reading is connected to multidimensional variables (e.g., cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental backgrounds). The question then is, how can it be taught in a culturally responsive fashion? Culturally responsive instruction involves taking advantage of students' culture, language, values, symbols, and history in designing instruction (Obiakor, 2003, 2007). It is tied to students' interests, experiences, and backgrounds; and by drawing upon students' prior knowledge, learning is made more meaningful and relevant (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Raphael, 1986). Seven characteristics for successful implementation of culturally responsive instruction include (1) teachers setting high expectations for students as they develop the literacy appropriate to their ages and abilities; (2) teachers developing positive relationships with families and the community in terms of curriculum content and relationships; (3) teachers exhibiting cultural sensitivity by modifying the curriculum, connecting the standards-based curriculum with the students' cultural backgrounds;

(4) teachers involving students more by incorporating active teaching methods; (5) teachers acting as facilitators when presenting information; and (6) teachers instructing around groups and pairs, reducing the anxiety of students by having them complete assignments individually but usually working in small groups or pairs with time to share ideas and think critically about the work before it is completed (Schmidt, 2005).

Every elementary classroom is made up of children of varying intellectual abilities, social or cultural backgrounds, language abilities, and physical attributes. Today, more than ever, all teachers must be prepared to meet the varying educational, emotional, and social needs of all children (Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, & Weaver, 1996; Obiakor, 2003, 2007). When we think about culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students specifically, we must remember that they are on the same reading and learning continuum as other children; however, they often have experiences that are different from the mainstream. For example, CLD students often are from lower socioeconomic status homes. As a result, limited emergent literacy experiences and exposure to literature from their own culture or from traditional American literature may inhibit their success in early literacy instruction. Also, CLD students may have literacy experiences that are different from what is expected by the school; thus, traditional early literacy programs may not adequately prepare them for beginning reading instruction (Stahl, 1990). If educators are to strive toward successful academic reading outcomes for "all" children, it is important to develop instructional strategies that empower all children to prosper, and this includes CLD children (Nichols et al., 1996; Utley et al., 2005).

Young children are more willing to learn in school when teachers organize classroom experiences in ways that take into account the language, learning styles, values, and knowledge they encounter at home or in the groups with whom they most identify (Trueba, 1984). Teachers using culturally compatible reading instruction can help the diverse student identify his own cultural individualism while simultaneously learning more literacy instruction (Au, 1993). These students may also not use processing strategies that can help them learn and remember content. While many students think strategically to solve problems outside of school (Holiday, 1985), such reasoning does not always find its way into the classroom of students who experience difficulties with reading. Most children are strategic learners. However, they sometimes are just not able to recognize that the strategies they use in their home cultural context can and should be applied to learning and solving problems at school.

On the whole, culturally responsive teaching involves creative planning and preparation. To teach reading creatively, Manzo and Casale (1985) and Manzo et al. (2005) proposed the L-R-D (Listen-Read-Discuss) method to offer several variations that can be phased into all literacy programs. For instance, Manzo et al. noted that "the L-R-D is a heuristic, or hands-on, activity designed to induce self-discovery about effective teaching by teachers and about effective learning by students" (p. 14). According to Manzo et al., teachers and service providers should do the following:

- Review the reading selection and prepare a brief, organized overview that points out the basic structures of the material, relevant

background information, and important information to look for and that piques interest in the topic.
- Present the summary orally to students.
- Have students read the textbook version of the same material. Students will then be empowered to read material with which they have some familiarity.
- Discuss the material students have heard and read.
- Begin the discussion with the information and ideas students were directed to look for (p. 14).

To motivate weak readers who come from CLD backgrounds, it is important that general and special educators avoid assumptions based on the following:

- *Biological determinism* (i.e., that reading problems/successes are based on genetic attributes)
- *Myth of socioeconomic dissonance* (i.e., that poverty is attributed to reading or learning capability or incapability)
- *Psychopathological problems* (i.e., that reading or learning problems are results of inner mental or delinquency problems)

Rather, general and special educators should create culturally responsive classroom and school environments that can foster collaborative learning. Manzo et al. (2005) concluded that general and special educators should do the following:

- Establish a sustained silent reading (SSR) program.
- Furnish students with interesting reading materials.
- Have students fill out a reading interest inventory, indicating the types of books they enjoy reading.
- Encourage students to join book clubs.
- Become reading motivators.
- Increase collaborative classroom activities.
- Use technology to encourage reading.
- Use bulletin boards.
- Ask students to use media supports (e.g., movies or television programs).
- Involve local writers, parents, and responsible adults.
- Give students incentives for reading.
- Conduct reading conferences with students.

In addition to the aforementioned techniques, Flint (2008) presented guiding principles for effective literacy instruction to help students to lead literate lives in the 21st century. Clearly, the guiding principles are imperatives that center around the fact that literacy practices must (a) be socially and culturally constructed, (b) be purposeful, (c) contain ideologies and values, (d) be learned through inquiry, (e) invite readers and writers to use their background knowledge and cultural understanding to make sense of texts, and (f) expand to include everyday texts and multimodal texts. In the end, it is important to remember that no technique will work unless

the teacher or service provider is culturally responsive (Obiakor, 2003). As Obiakor concluded, strategies work when general and special educators (a) know themselves and are confident in what they can do, (b) learn the facts when they are in doubt, (c) change their thinking, (d) use resource persons, (e) build self-concepts, (f) teach with divergent techniques, (g) make the right choices, and (h) continue to learn.

REVISITING CHIDI ■

Remember Chidi? He was labeled as a student with reading problems by his teacher because he was quiet and not rambunctious. He was perceived to have a problem that he never had! The interesting thing here is that perceptions can sometimes be right; however, they have far-reaching, devastating consequences when they are wrong. Apparently, Chidi was misperceived because of his cultural difference as demonstrated by his name. He could have been taught how to expand on his reading skills—his teacher was already introducing the class to alphabets and word association. But his teacher did not know him or his reading capabilities. This lack of awareness prevented her from knowing what strengths he brought to the classroom.

The National Reading Panel (2000) prescribed critical areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that could help maximize the reading potential of any student with or without a reading problem. All students deserve support in spite of their reading levels. Focusing on the important areas of needs would have helped the teacher to expand on Chidi's reading skills and also on "what is" rather than "what is not." Sadly, teachers spend much time harping on distractions to learning or presumed reading/literacy deficiency instead of what they can do to buttress it. We believe well-prepared, culturally responsive teachers or service providers try to know the present levels of their students as they creatively design, modify, and adapt their instructional techniques. Time spent labeling students and struggling with parents is time spent not teaching and collaborating. Teachers lose teachable moments when they are not paying attention. Clearly, collaboration works in classrooms where consultation and cooperation are in full force!

MOVING ON ■

In this chapter, we have argued that reading is an integral part of learning and teaching. We believe that educators cannot afford to make assumptions about reading unless they are completely sure that reading has been taught. Rather than make assumptions based on biological determinism, the myth of socioeconomic dissonance, or psychopathological disorders, general and special educators should focus on how to address skills and areas central to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It is important that educators understand the different dimensions of literacy and culture. In-school, out-of-school, and past experiences, as well as a host of other variables, affect reading and literacy.

When we fail to understand these critical relationships, we run the risk of either solving a problem that does not exist or using a wrong strategy to solve the right problem. Our hunch is that reading problems cannot be solved by testing alone! We believe that culturally responsive educators and service providers creatively plan and implement culturally sensitive strategies and environments to maximize the potential of all learners.