Effective Instruction for Middle School Students with Reading Difficulties:

The Reading Teacher's Sourcebook

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Chapter 3: Using Assessment Results to Plan Instruction

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GROUPING STUDENTS FOR INSTRUCTION

Once Miss Lopez determines the specific areas of instruction each student needs, she groups students accordingly and focuses instruction according to the needs of each group. Students benefit when teachers use a variety of grouping formats such as working with students individually, even for a minute or two; small-group and whole-group instruction; and pairs (Vaughn et al., 2003). Pairing peers to work together can be motivating to students while freeing up the teacher to work with small groups (University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts [UTCRLA], 2003d). Smaller groups and paired peers make it possible for a student to receive more immediate feedback from a teacher or a peer and increase active student engagement.

Teachers find it challenging to adequately instruct students with a variety of needs in a whole-group setting. Often, this is not as productive as using smaller, homogeneous groups with instructional goals based on the needs of students in the group, as reflected in diagnostic and progress monitoring assessments. Although it is not possible to form perfectly homogeneous groups, the more similar the needs of the students in each group, the more efficiently Miss Lopez will be able to instruct her students. Miss Lopez also remembers that group assignments are based on a dynamic process in which changes are made according to student progress (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002). Students do not remain in the same group for every activity or for months across the school year.

Typically, secondary struggling readers can be grouped into four categories, as illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Categories of Secondary Struggling Readers.

Student needs	Focus on …
Adequate skills (good decoding ability, average vocabulary knowledge, can decode fluently) but poor text comprehension	Comprehension strategies + vocabulary
Low fluency level and poor text comprehension, but adequate word recognition	Comprehension strategies + vocabulary + fluency practice with connected text
Weak decoding ability; slow, dysfluent reading; poor text comprehension	Comprehension strategies + vocabulary + word recognition practice and fluency practice with connected text
Severely impaired decoding ability, very low fluency, poor text comprehension	Explicit, systematic instruction in decoding and word recognition + fluency + vocabulary + comprehension (At this level, each daily lesson includes instruction in word reading as well as opportunities to practice and to apply comprehension strategies reading instructional-level text.)

DETERMINING THE INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS

Next, Miss Lopez determines her instructional focus based on the results of her assessments. One way to approach this task is to organize all of a class' assessment data in a table to identify students with similar needs. Figure 11 shows sample eighth-grade data. Miss Lopez gave an ORF measure to her students and then determined who was reading below 100 WCPM. For those students, she gave additional measures to determine why they were not reading fluently. On the table, the letters *MB* stand for *meets benchmark* and the letters *SD* stand for *still developing*, indicating dimensions of reading for which students have attained grade-level competence or are not yet developed to that level, respectively.

Figure 11. Results of Miss Lopez's ORF Testing.

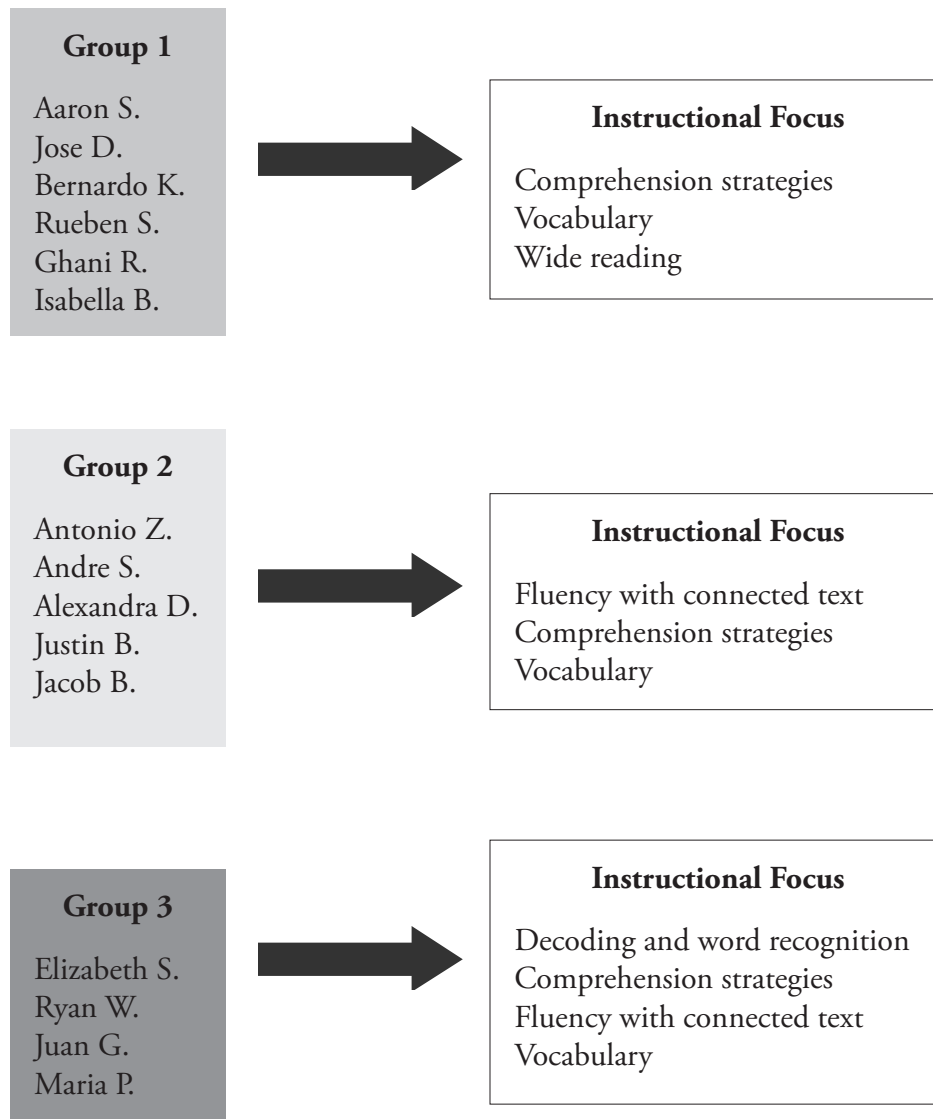| Student Name	ORF	Plan of Action	Test of Word Reading Efficiency	Plan of Action	San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability	Plan of Action
Elizabeth S.	77	CT	SD	CT	SD	DT
Ryan W.	62	CT	SD	CT	SD	DT
Aaron S.	162	DT				
Jose D.	103	DT				
Bernardo K.	179	DT				
Juan G.	85	CT	SD	CT	SD	DT
Maria P.	52	CT	SD	CT	SD	DT
Rueben S.	154	DT				
Ghani R.	155	DT				
Antonio Z.	89	CT	MB	DT		
Isabella B.	170	DT				
Andre S.	95	CT	MB	DT		
Alexandra D.	87	CT	MB	DT		
Justin B.	98	CT	MB	DT		
Jacob B.	99	CT	MB	DT		

*Note: CT = Continue Testing; DT = Discontinue Testing (see Figure 12 for instructional focus);
SD = Still Developing; MB = Meets Benchmark.*

The steps Miss Lopez followed to form groups in her class:

1. After determining that all students had comprehension needs in her class (from previous assessments and grades), Miss Lopez administered a measure of oral reading fluency to each student.

2. Miss Lopez identified that six of her students (Aaron, Jose, Bernardo, Rueben, Ghani, and Isabella) were reading above 100 WCPM. Miss Lopez determined that these students' needs were primarily in the areas of comprehension and vocabulary. She will continue to monitor Jose's reading fluency and accuracy because his score is close to the 100 WCPM benchmark.

3. For the remaining nine students whose ORF scores fell below 100 WCPM, Miss Lopez administered more specific measures to assess the sources of the students' comprehension and fluency needs. She gave these nine students the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE) to test individual word reading skills and the San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability to test knowledge of phonics and syllabication (see the Resources section for more information about these assessments).

4. Then Miss Lopez recorded all the scores in a table so that she could appropriately group students and determine their instructional focus. Teachers use the guidelines for interpreting scores on individual assessments along with individual judgment to determine whether students' skills are developed (D) or still developing (SD). Generally, if a student scores below the 25th or 30th percentile on a standardized test like the TOWRE, the student will be considered still developing.

5. Based on the scores recorded in the table, Miss Lopez was able to group her students and determine the instructional focus for each group, as shown in Figure 12.

FIGURE 12. MISS LOPEZ'S GROUPINGS

Group 1

Aaron S.
Jose D.
Bernardo K.
Rueben S.
Ghani R.
Isabella B.

→ **Instructional Focus**

Comprehension strategies
Vocabulary
Wide reading

Group 2

Antonio Z.
Andre S.
Alexandra D.
Justin B.
Jacob B.

→ **Instructional Focus**

Fluency with connected text
Comprehension strategies
Vocabulary

Group 3

Elizabeth S.
Ryan W.
Juan G.
Maria P.

→ **Instructional Focus**

Decoding and word recognition
Comprehension strategies
Fluency with connected text
Vocabulary

Miss Lopez meets with each of these small groups for a portion of the class at least two or three times per week so that she can provide instruction to target their particular needs. She may meet with Group 3 every day for a few minutes of systematic instruction in phonics and word reading. Since all her students need work on comprehension and vocabulary strategies, Miss Lopez will provide instruction in these areas to the whole class. Although she will primarily focus on the same strategies (i.e., summarizing, predicting, questioning) for all students, students will practice applying the strategies in instructional-level text. Thus, different students will be applying the same strategies using different text.

If a student is working independently, it can be helpful to have the student apply a comprehension strategy in independent-level text until he or she becomes proficient at that strategy. However, if the student is learning through guided practice, instructional-level text is appropriate. With a great deal of support (for example, having students engage in partner reading in which a higher-performing student reads a section of text aloud followed by the lower-skilled reader reading the same section of text aloud), students may apply comprehension strategies in frustration-level text. Exposing students to text above their reading level is important so that students come in contact with challenging vocabulary and sentence structures (Stahl, 2003). However, it is important to keep in mind that reading frustration-level text with no support can

promote use of ineffective strategies and decrease motivation to read. Constantly reading frustration-level text is—well—frustrating!

These factors can also be considered when selecting text for students:

FIGURE 13. FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING TEXT FOR STUDENTS.

Student-related	Text-related
Word-recognition ability: How accurately does the student read the words in the text?	**Text format:** How much print is on the page? How complex are the sentences?
Fluency: Can the student read the text fluently enough to understand and remember what is being read and to enjoy reading?	**Vocabulary:** Are there difficult vocabulary words that will make comprehension difficult? Is it necessary to understand the challenging words in order to comprehend the text? If so, can difficult words be pretaught?
Comprehension strategies: Is the student a strategic reader? Does the student monitor and self-correct errors? Does he or she stop and form connections to the text?	**Genre:** What type of material is it? Is it narrative or expository? If it is expository, is it well organized, with clearly presented ideas in coherent paragraphs?
Interest and motivation: What is the student interested in? What topics will keep his or her attention? Can you give the student a choice of reading material?	**Content and concepts:** What is the topic of the text? Is the subject matter accessible to the students? If the students do not have sufficient background knowledge to relate to the text, can ideas be pretaught to make it easier for students to access the text?
Background and vocabulary knowledge: What background knowledge does the student bring to the text?	**Illustrations/Graphics:** Do the graphics support the text? What is the quality of the graphics?

SETTING SHORT-TERM GOALS WITH STUDENTS

Work with students to set short-term intermediate goals so that both you and the students can monitor progress toward larger goals through manageable steps. Using a task analysis procedure, large goals can be refined into smaller steps. For example, if a student's goal is to read multisyllabic words made up of closed, open, and vowel-consonant-*e* syllable types (such as the words *amputate* and *monopolize*), a teacher might break this into manageable steps:

- Recognize and read closed syllables (*am*).

- Apply these skills to read multisyllabic words.

It is possible for these steps to be broken down even further. Students benefit when they are aware of their goals and track their progress. See Chapter 9: Word Recognition for a description of instruction in multisyllable word reading.

SCHEDULING SMALL-GROUP INSTRUCTION

After dividing her class into appropriate groups and determining each group's instructional focus, Miss Lopez can design a weekly schedule. A sample schedule based on 50-minute periods is shown in Figure 14. More detail about what to teach and how to teach it is included in Parts 2 and 3 of this guide.

Figure 14. Miss Lopez's Class Schedule.

10-minute Blocks		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1st 10 Minutes	Grouping and Focus	Whole-group Direct Instruction: Comprehension	Whole-group Review: Comprehension	Whole-group Review: Comprehension	Whole-group Direct Instruction: Vocabulary	Whole-group Review: Vocabulary
	Grouping and Focus	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2nd 10 Minutes	Grouping and Focus	Whole-group Direct Instruction: Comprehension	Groups 1 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading: Fluency	Whole-group Direct Instruction: Vocabulary	Groups 2 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Vocabulary
	Grouping and Focus	n/a	Group 2 with Teacher: Fluency with Connected Text	Group 3 with Teacher: Decoding and Word Recognition		Group 1 with Teacher: Vocabulary and Comprehension
3rd 10 Minutes	Grouping and Focus	Whole-group Guided Practice: Comprehension	Groups 1 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading: Fluency	Whole-group Guided Practice: Vocabulary	Groups 2 and 3 Independent Practice in Pairs: Vocabulary
	Grouping and Focus	n/a	Group 2 with Teacher: Fluency with Connected Text	Group 3 with Teacher: Decoding and Word Recognition		Group 1 with Teacher: Vocabulary and Comprehension
4th 10 Minutes	Grouping and Focus	Groups 1 and 2 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading (Pairs): Fluency	Groups 2 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Vocabulary	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading: Fluency and Comprehension
	Grouping and Focus	Group 3 with Teacher: Review Comprehension Lesson; Decoding and Word Recognition	Group 3 with Teacher: Review Comprehension Lesson; Decoding and Word Recognition	Group 1 with Teacher: Vocabulary and Comprehension	Group 2 with Teacher: Fluency	n/a
5th 10 Minutes	Grouping and Focus	Groups 1 and 2 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading (Pairs): Fluency	Groups 2 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Comprehension (Text Reading)	Groups 1 and 3 Independent Practice (Pairs): Vocabulary	Groups 1 and 2 Partner Reading: Fluency and Comprehension
	Grouping and Focus	Small Group 3 with Teacher: Review Comprehension Lesson; Decoding and Word Recognition	Small Group 3 with Teacher: Review Comprehension Lesson; Decoding and Word Recognition	Group 1 with Teacher: Vocabulary and Comprehension	Group 2 with Teacher: Fluency Progress Monitoring	Group 3 with Teacher: Review Vocabulary Lesson; Decoding and Word Recognition

Monday:

On Monday, Miss Lopez will teach a comprehension strategy to the entire class for approximately 20 minutes. After this, she will give students guided practice in the strategy (includes reading connected text). During the last 20 minutes of class, Miss Lopez will meet with Group 3, the students who need to focus on word reading and decoding, to support them in practicing the comprehension strategy and to directly teach and provide practice in decoding and word reading, while Groups 1 and 2 continue to read and practice applying the comprehension strategy in pairs. Miss Lopez will assign homework related to the comprehension strategy she taught during this lesson.

Tuesday:

On Tuesday, Miss Lopez will briefly review the strategy she taught on Monday and review the homework that was assigned. This is important so that she will know whether the students are ready for independent practice. Once she determines they are ready, she will assign independent practice using the strategy. Students will apply the strategy in different levels of text depending on their reading levels. While students are working independently, Miss Lopez will meet with Group 2, and then with Group 3, for 20 minutes each.

Wednesday:

On Wednesday, Miss Lopez will again start the class with 10 minutes of whole-class review of the comprehension strategy that was taught on Monday. Then she will meet with Group 3 for 20 minutes to continue her instruction in word-reading skills and strategies. During this time, Groups 1 and 2 will partner read to support reading fluency. For the last 20 minutes of the class, Miss Lopez will meet with Group 1 and focus on comprehension and vocabulary while Groups 2 and 3 engage in independent practice of the comprehension strategy during reading of connected text.

Thursday:

Thursday's lesson will be similar to Monday's lesson, but Miss Lopez will focus on teaching a vocabulary-learning strategy to the entire class with guided practice. During the last 20 minutes, Miss Lopez will meet with Group 2 to work on fluency while Groups 1 and 3 independently practice the vocabulary strategy in pairs. Again, Miss Lopez will assign homework that aligns with what she taught in class.

Friday:

On Friday, Miss Lopez will first do a short review with her whole class. She will then meet with Group 1 and then Group 3 while the other students work in pairs on fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

This schedule is just one example. There are many other ways to design a weekly schedule for effective instruction. Teachers must consider the needs of each student, each small group, and the class as a whole. The needs of the students will dictate the balance between small-group and whole-class instruction, as well as the instructional focus of each lesson.

AN ALTERNATIVE SCHEDULE FOR READING INTERVENTION CLASSES

If students in a reading intervention class have very similar needs, a schedule such as the one in Figure 15 (on the following page) may be appropriate. The number of minutes dedicated to each activity may be adjusted (or whole activities eliminated) according to the needs reflected on student assessments. At the same time, if many students in the group have severe word reading difficulties, more time should be devoted to systematic instruction in word recognition (see Chapter 9: Word Recognition).

Figure 15. Sample Instructional Sequence for Reading Instruction (Based on a 45-minute Class).

Every Day for the First 4–6 Weeks of Intervention	
Component(s)	Time Range (in mins.)
Fluency (Partner Reading)	7–10
Vocabulary Instruction (Prefixes, Suffixes, Base Words, and Roots)	8–10
Multisyllable Word Reading Instruction and Practice	18–24
Spelling Dictation	4–6

Sample Weekly Schedule for Remainder of Intervention	
Component(s)	Time Range (in mins.)
Monday	
Fluency (if needed) or Other Text Reading (Partner Reading)	7–10
Multisyllable Word Reading Practice or Vocabulary Word Part Review	6–8
Vocabulary Instruction	15–25
Spelling Dictation	6–8
Tuesday	
Fluency (if needed) or Other Text Reading (Partner Reading)	7–10
Vocabulary Review and Practice	5–7
Comprehension Strategy Instruction (Modeling and Guided Practice)	10–15
Passage Reading, Applying Comprehension Strategy	15–20
Wednesday	
Fluency (if needed) or Other Text Reading (Partner Reading)	7–10
Vocabulary Review and Practice	5–7
Comprehension Strategy Instruction, continued	8–10
Passage Reading, Applying Comprehension Strategy	20–25

(figure continued on the next page)

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Sample Weekly Schedule for Remainder of Intervention	
Component(s)	Time Range (in mins.)
Thursday	
Fluency (if needed) or Other Text Reading (Partner Reading)	7–10
Multisyllable Word Reading Practice or Vocabulary Word Part Review	6–8
Vocabulary Review and Practice	8–10
Comprehension Strategy Instruction, continued; Passage Reading, Applying Comprehension Strategy	25–35
Friday	
Fluency (if needed) or Other Text Reading (Partner Reading)	7–10
Comprehension Review	6–8
Expository Writing (Write a summary of the passage or an essay using the same text structure as the passage, guided by a graphic organizer.)	25–35

MANAGING SMALL-GROUP INSTRUCTION

Teachers who have not previously implemented small-group instruction may feel overwhelmed by such a schedule. It can be helpful to begin by incorporating small-group instruction a little at a time, working with small groups one or two days a week at first and then gradually adding small-group lessons as the teacher and students become comfortable with this instructional arrangement.

As you plan lessons, keep in mind that even though students need direct instruction in reading skills and strategies, they also need daily practice reading interesting text at their independent or instructional reading levels. This reading may be done independently, in pairs, or chorally and may provide opportunities to apply comprehension strategies, vocabulary strategies, or word reading skills, or to build fluency. When students engage in guided and independent practice of strategies and skills, most of this practice occurs in the context of reading text. Practicing does not mean completing worksheets. This manual contains many examples of lesson plans with guided and independent practice activities designed to support student learning.

Classroom management is very important in small-group instructional formats. While the teacher works with a small group, other students must be able to work without direct teacher supervision. Implementing this model successfully requires that students learn and practice regular routines. Directly teaching these routines is the key to sanity for the teacher and successful progress for the students. In other words, teachers directly teach students what they want the students to do as they work in pairs, when they have completed an assignment, or in other situations in which students will be expected to work independently of the teacher (see page 225 for an example of a lesson designed to teach a partner reading routine).

By middle school, some students who struggle with reading are several years behind their normally developing peers. In order to catch up, struggling readers must learn at a faster rate than higher-performing students. This means that there is absolutely no time to waste. Every minute of class time is precious. While the teacher is working with a small group, the other students must be actively engaged in practicing strategies and skills they are learning. Students are not given "seatwork" to keep them occupied. Every activity is purposeful and directed at the critical skills students need to be competent, successful readers.

Note that students may change groups as often as appropriate, depending on their rates of progress in comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and word recognition. It is important to monitor progress carefully so students are not "held back," receiving instruction that no longer meets their needs.

Sample Instructional Sequence for Reading Instruction
(Based on a 45-minute Class)

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Passage Reading, Applying Comprehension Strategy	15–20
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Vocabulary Review and Practice	5–7
Comprehension Strategy Instruction, continued	8–10