



In the Real World: Leading the Way to Reading Success

A Q&A with a reading specialist.

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by Christopher Peal

As educational leaders, we all have areas of detailed knowledge and expertise. While we are resident experts on some topics, on other topics we rely heavily on colleagues and other resources to help provide the information and knowledge we need to create the best possible learning experiences for our students.

For this issue's column, I consulted one of my resources, Lynn Mangold. Mangold is a certified Reading Recovery teacher leader in my district. Through her training with reading education professor Linda Dorn, presentations at state and national conferences, and university-level lectures, Mangold has become one of the finest field experts in reading education. The following are excerpts of a recent dialogue with Mangold regarding literacy instruction.

Peal: When you hear the phrase “reading across the curriculum,” what immediately comes to mind?

Mangold: Students need to be taught how different types of text are constructed. Educators must help students develop the conceptual vocabulary needed to deal with content-area reading. It is so important that students have time to read, are taught how to have conversations about the content of what they read, and use writing as a way to become better readers and writers.

Peal: What is the one thing a building administrator could do to improve reading in his or her school?

Mangold: An administrator should support teachers by engaging them in ongoing conversations about literacy. Embedding staff development into the school day really helps teachers. Our district uses a “model classroom project” adapted from Linda Dorn’s work at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock. Therein, one teacher agrees to work with a literacy coach and have the “model” classroom. That teacher opens her classroom for observation by her peers during the school day. This enables teachers not only to read about best literacy practices, but to also see how they look in a classroom right down the hall.

Peal: What are the key components of reading instruction?

Mangold: Instruction must meet a student’s needs and must change over time as that student’s reading process develops and grows. Scripted programs or a one-size-fits-all way of teaching cannot do this. Of course, students should understand sound and symbol relationships, but reading is much more complex than that. Fountas and Pinnell’s *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency* clarifies that students need to perform certain strategic actions in their heads while they are reading. Students need to have ways of thinking within the text, beyond the text, and about the text. Using formative assessments like Running Records and note-taking with goal-setting in individual conferences can also assist a teacher to be more precise and to teach for change over time. Students must be taught what they need to learn next to be efficient, proficient, and lifelong readers.

Peal: What role does central office play in the teaching of reading?

Mangold: Central office plays a big role in the teaching of reading by supporting teachers in the following ways:

- Providing a variety of books so students will have a lot of practice in learning how to read;

- Providing and supporting ongoing staff development at the building level so teaching is transparent and is not done behind closed doors;
- Encouraging “big” conversations that center around student work so that teachers can plan and work closely on next learning steps for students; and
- Providing professional resources so that teachers can study together and learn to continually improve their craft of teaching.

Peal: How can schools best assist struggling readers?

Mangold: Schools need to have the most highly qualified teachers working with their most at-risk students. These teachers should understand how to match an intervention to what the struggling reader needs to attend to first, and how to design a series of lessons that will assist those children using research-based best practices. With tight funding, schools should invest in programs that have been shown to be highly effective, such as Reading Recovery. The U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse provides a good reference for successful programs.

Peal: How can schools best assist advanced readers?

Mangold: I almost think the same answer holds as for struggling readers. Highly qualified teachers that understand how to think about meeting the needs of all students need to be in place. All students need to continue to grow and develop new skills and strategies so that they can become successful readers in many different genres. We should want all students to be lifelong readers who love to talk and write about their reading.

Peal: What is the next frontier for reading instruction?

Mangold: We now know so much from research about effective practices for teaching reading. We need to make sure that we have strong, ongoing professional development for teachers that encourages them to be thinkers and problem solvers and to help them bridge the gap between research and practice.

From the field,

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