

# Adolescent Literacy

## What We Know

### Word Analysis and Recognition

- By the time most readers enter the middle grades, the fundamentals of word recognition have been mastered.
- Adolescents continue to learn about word analysis (roots, affixes).
- Word attack and word recognition among struggling readers levels off around a 3rd-5th grade level.
- Deficits in phonological awareness characterize teens who are poor readers.
- Work on sound-symbol relationships can yield significant improvements on standardized reading tests.
- Previewing text improves oral reading accuracy.

### Fluency

- Fluency distinguishes skilled from less-skilled readers through adolescence.
- Reading rates can be improved with instruction that emphasizes practice.

### Vocabulary

- Defining words develops through high school.
- Grade 6 = >7,500 root words; Grade 8 = >11,000 root words; Grade 12 >15,000 root words.
- By Grade 6, vocabulary decelerates in poor readers.
- Resolving unknown words is a key issue.
- Direct teaching of word meanings and independent word learning strategies is needed.

### Sentence and Discourse Processing

- By 6th grade, sentence and discourse factors contribute more to comprehension than word factors.
- As students get older, discourse is more important than sentence (inferencing).
- Comprehension among poor reader is better on materials with simple syntax and narrative structure.
- Teaching notetaking and summarizing can improve overall comprehension, especially among poor readers.

### Background Knowledge

- Declarative knowledge and exposure to print are significant predictors of high school comprehension, even after general intelligence is controlled.
- When knowledge is minimal, students benefit from well-written texts; when readers are knowledgeable, less coherence in text can promote better comprehension.

### Strategic Knowledge

- Poor readers use fewer problem-solving strategies; this appears to have less to do with difficulty learning the strategies and more to do with using and regulating them effectively.
- Ability to integrate and use inform from multiple sources is lacking even among proficient high school readers.
- A reciprocal relationship exists between strategy use and motivation.
- Students need instruction on when and why to use the strategies; instruction should be direct and long term and should include modeling.
- Only 1 out of 3 thirteen year olds and 1 out of 4 seventeen year olds read voluntarily.

### Context

- Professional development directed toward assisting teachers in promoting active reading strategies can change students' willingness to use those strategies and can lead to an improvement in their comprehension.
- Classrooms successful in promoting literacy: use a variety of approaches, integrate test preparation into instruction, make overt connections among in-school and out-of-school applications, enable strategy use, engage students in uses of their knowledge and skills, and incorporate collaborative work.
- Adolescents say they want to receive content area reading instruction, using cooperative and groups study guides versus writing summaries and answering questions.

Taken from Curtis, M. E. (2002). Adolescent reading: A synthesis of research. Adolescent Workshop Proceedings.