

Support for struggling readers

Third and fifth grade teachers were asked what best describes their approach for assisting struggling readers. Some student needs were met largely in the classroom, others received additional help from specialists outside of the classroom, and some students were assisted through a collaborative effort between classroom teachers and reading specialists. These three approaches were used equally by teachers. However, 55% of the fifth grade teachers took advantage of the home-school connection, compared to 30% of the third grade teachers. While the research shows that a reading workshop model is an effective instructional approach for struggling readers (Allington, 2001), phonics-based approaches were used by most teachers. In the 1993-1994 study, many teachers felt they needed more support for accommodating troubled readers.

Recommendations and analysis:

" Effective intervention in the classroom, along with focused instruction by a literacy expert, are important elements of a support system for struggling readers (Allington, 2001). In both settings, small-group instruction (1-3 students) best fosters progress and success (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). In addition, it is important that instruction within and outside the classroom complement and expand upon each other. Classroom teachers and literacy specialists are encouraged to work closely together to provide the most intensive, effective, cohesive intervention possible for struggling readers (Allington, 2001).

" Although struggling readers may profit from instruction in phonics, this should not be the primary instructional program. They should be provided with many opportunities to read authentic texts. Some researchers have recommended that struggling readers should be reading self-selected texts 90 minutes a day to acquire the fluency necessary for skilled reading (Allington, 2001).