

Study: Supplemental reading programs work better when aligned with core curricula

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Students who struggle with reading get an extra benefit from a supplemental reading program when its content is aligned with the students' core reading curriculum, according to a study published in the December issue of the *Elementary School Journal*.

The findings suggest that supplemental reading programs work best when they mirror core curricula in scope and sequence rather than simply being "layered on top," write the study's authors, Carla Wonder-McDowell, D. Ray Reutzel (Utah State University), and John A. Smith (University of Texas-Arlington).

The study focused on 133 second-graders who had scored in the lowest quartile of a reading assessment test. The [students](#) were divided in two groups, with one receiving supplemental instruction that was aligned with the core curricula and the other receiving unaligned supplementary instruction. Both groups were given a pre- and post-test to assess their progress.

"Lesson activities in the aligned ... group were designed to reinforce classroom core reading instruction content, delivery, sequence, and pacing," the researchers write. For example, the classroom curriculum specified that phonics instruction begin with short vowel sounds. In the aligned group, the supplemental program was altered to start with short vowels, mirroring the core instruction. In the unaligned group, the students followed an unaltered supplemental program, which started phonics with a mixture of long and short vowels.

Students' test scores showed that while both groups showed significant improvement in reading skills, the aligned group did better. Sixty percent of students in the aligned group scored above the 40th and 50th percentiles, while less than 50 percent of students in the unaligned group scored that high. The aligned group showed greater skill in reading comprehension, fluency, and word decoding.

"This study points to small but consistent advantages for aligning supplementary reading instruction with the classroom core instruction provided to struggling grade 2 readers," the researchers conclude. "To do so requires significant collaboration of classroom teachers and other school service providers to unify the educational experiences of students learning to read."

More information: Carla Wonder-McDowell, D. Ray Reutzel, and John A. Smith, "Does Instructional Alignment Matter?" *The Elementary School Journal* 112:2 (December 2011).

Provided by University of Chicago

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