

Scientific Research Base for Classroom Connect's Connected Educator Reading

A Summary of Research Findings on
Adult Online Learning and Reading Instruction

What is Connected Educator Reading?

Connected Educator Reading is professional development for reading teachers. Designed by Classroom Connect, it meets the standards of the National Staff Development Council and the recommendations of the U.S. Department of Education. Connected Educator Reading helps teachers understand the core elements of reading and provides hands-on practice of skills they need to teach their students. Connected Educator Reading sheds light on the research behind effective teaching strategies and uses video examples of real teachers using those strategies in the classroom. This professional development program supports a learning community and makes it possible for teachers to learn from each other through discussions with their colleagues at school and across the nation. It helps teachers track and report their progress through the courses and documents what areas are mastered. Finally, it provides ready-made plans for lessons and activities related to the courses that teachers can put to immediate use in their classrooms.

“No part of the movement toward scientifically-based reading instruction is more important than professional development for the teacher. Programs do not teach; teachers do. Effective professional development will improve student achievement, support consistent implementation of a comprehensive reading program, build school capacity, and increase faculty morale, collaboration, and commitment. Professional development must be for all educators who share responsibility for groups of children.”

The Secretary's Reading Leadership Academy ¹

¹ As part of the U.S. Department of Education's efforts to equip states with the information and resources they need to implement the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige hosted policymakers and key education leaders from every state and territory in the nation at three Reading Leadership Academies funded by the National Institute for Literacy. The academies were designed to help state leaders gear up for the implementation of Reading First.

Introduction

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This law increases the demands on K-12 educators to account for their successes in terms of what each student accomplishes. Two major principles of this law emphasize teaching methods that have been proven to work and stronger accountability for the results of teaching. Thus, the current administration has been emphasizing the need for continuous professional development because "[h]igh quality professional development on an ongoing basis is one way schools and districts can leverage improvement in professional practice and increased student achievement." (NSDC & NICI, 2001, p. 3).

Since 1994, Classroom Connect has been providing the K-12 education community with innovative resources and professional development solutions. Connected Educator Reading, Classroom Connect's Web-based professional development program dedicated to helping teachers become better reading teachers, provides educators with courses, learning resources, just-in-time support, and a convenient way to interact with peers to improve student learning in the classroom.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 also contains the most comprehensive reforms of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act since it was enacted in 1965. One fundamental principle of the new law is an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work, especially in the area of reading instruction.

In 1997, as part of the Reading Excellence Act, Congress mandated a study be undertaken to analyze and report on the "status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read (focusing on the critical years of kindergarten to grade three)." The Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, in cooperation with the Secretary of Education, formed a National Reading Panel (NRP) of leading authorities in reading research. The NRP held a series of public hearings, interviewed experts in the field, and reviewed over 100,000 studies to meet the Congressional mandate.

In September 2001, the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, created a new publication titled *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read: Kindergarten Through Grade 3*. The purpose of this document was to summarize the findings of the NRP and suggest implications for classroom instruction. *Put Reading First* is organized into five sections—Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Text Comprehension—each of which represents a major building block for reading success.

Connected Educator Reading addresses all five of the building blocks of reading instruction through several courses and resources. The program helps teachers learn targeted strategies and gain access to tools that help their students become successful readers.

Introduction (continued)

The purpose of this document is two-fold:

1. To demonstrate explicitly how Classroom Connect's Connected Educator Reading meets national standards for staff development and how it incorporates research-based strategies and recommendations for adult learning;
2. To display clearly how the content and practices of Connected Educator Reading align with the extensive research findings of the National Reading Panel and the recommendations of The Secretary's Reading Leadership Academy.

As such, this document is organized into two parts.

Part 1: Online Adult Learning

To help make the connections between standards, research, and Connected Educator Reading, the sections in Part 1 are organized by:

- A key **Standard** as identified by the National Staff Development Council¹ (NSDC) to guide high-quality performance in professional learning;
- **Excerpts from the Research** that support and guide product development and implementation;
- **From Research to Practice** providing features and instructional references that show how Connected Educator Reading incorporates the particular standards and research-based instructional recommendations.

Part 2: Reading Instruction

To clarify the connections between the *Put Reading First* research recommendations and Connected Educator Reading content, the sections in Part 2 are organized by:

- ***Put Reading First* Recommendations** that summarize key recommendations from *Put Reading First*.
- **Excerpts from the Research** that support and guide product content development;
- **From Research to Practice** providing references that show how Connected Educator Reading addresses the research-based instructional recommendations in the initial courses being offered.

¹ The National Staff Development Council is a non-profit association comprised of educators, experts, and industry leaders who are committed to high quality staff development standards. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes the NSDC as an authoritative resource of standards and guidelines for teacher professional development. The standards are derived from the Council's experience and body of research.

Part One: Online Adult Learning

NSDC STANDARD: DESIGN

Effective staff development uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.

Essential elements:

- Learning options
- Learning strategies

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- "...[the] benefits of online courses extend beyond the time and place of independence they provide for participants, but also include the reflective and social environment they can foster." (Barab, Thomas, & Merrill, 2001, p. 135)
- "...there are many issues to consider when developing online learning environments, including making assignments relevant to teachers' experiences, constructing coordinated learning environments, providing timely feedback, creating rich environments for interaction, and providing flexibility by fostering anytime anywhere teaching and learning." (Levin, S., Waddoups, Levin, J., & Buell, 2001, Online)
- "...providing adequate and timely feedback to students is another important element of online teaching. Because students are remote, it is important to develop mechanisms that provide feedback to students on their progress in a timely manner." (Levin, S., Waddoups, Levin, J., & Buell, 2001, Online)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

Connected Educator Reading provides:

- Multiple learning formats, providing a structured learning environment with the flexibility to meet the needs of learners with varied learning preferences. When learners register for an online course, they can choose to complete it: a) on their own in a self-paced format; b) with an online cohort group of colleagues who desire regular interaction; c) for CEU credits, including online discussion and completion of a collaborative project.
- An opportunity for learners to work at their own pace while having the support, coaching, and timely feedback of trained faculty, regardless of their registration preference.
- A program wide self-appraisal tool, allowing teachers to understand their current learning needs and providing recommendations for courses and resources that are directly related to those needs.
- A pre-course assessment, giving teachers the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of key concepts and pointing them in the direction of specific course content they have yet to master.

Part One: Online Adult Learning (continued)

NSDC STANDARD: LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Effective staff development organizes adults into learning communities that allow and support the development of shared goals and expectations among the participants.

Essential elements:

- Shared vision and goals
- Expectation for collegial interaction
- Learning teams

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- "Online students [can take] advantage of the opportunities to interact, to form social networks [that help them] gain confidence...in an unfamiliar learning environment. Social interaction is...an important element of being online, both to support learning and for mutual support of learners." (Reilly & Newton, 2002)
- "[T]he way the course is structured creates opportunities for media to be used to maintain contact with others. This is an important point to consider when designing such classes because the opportunities for interaction support not only the class content, but also the invisible social community that makes it possible and fun to engage in this sort of learning community." (Haythronthwaite, Kazmer, & Robins, 2000, Online)
- "The Web-based delivery medium did not inhibit the development of the class as a community. In many ways, it actually contributed to the formation of a cohesive group." (Poole, 2001, p. 175)
- "Through carefully analyzing the anatomy of courses, it appears that students were more satisfied with a course environment in which they were provided content and opportunity to construct meanings through social interaction." (Jiang & Meskill, 2000, p. 14)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

Connected Educator Reading enables learners from all parts of the country to communicate and collaborate in online courses through the use of trained faculty and discussions.

- Connected Educator faculty are trained to facilitate online discussions, motivate learners, encourage and facilitate group collaboration, problem solve, and emphasize the goals and expectations of each course.
- Each guide-led course features discussions where learners meet, share information, and offer insights. Each learner is encouraged to participate in online discussions on a regular basis by responding to course-related questions.
- Connected Educator learners may optionally collaborate in the design, implementation, and completion of course projects.

Part One: Online Adult Learning (continued)

NSDC STANDARD: LEARNING

Effective staff development applies knowledge about human learning and change.

Essential elements:

- Supporting change
- Adult learning needs
- Educators' professional goals

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- Motivation or learning is strongest in adult learners when "they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in life situations." (Knowles, 1990, p. 61)
- "Students are more engaged in activity when it is personally relevant to them." (Levin, S., Waddoups, Levin, J., & Buell, 2001, Online)
- "Teacher education programs that direct individuals to reflect on their own beliefs about teaching and technology as well as to consider the real-world limits that exist in today's classrooms are what teachers need..." (Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon, & Byers, 2002, p. 3)
- "Critical reflection [is] particularly effective in helping teachers analyze and improve their instructional practice." (Gray, 1998, p. 65)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

Connected Educator Reading resources allow learners to assess their understanding of reading instruction concepts and provide them with knowledge that can be used within the classroom. The professional development program provides learners with reflection opportunities through online discussions and optional course projects. Specific examples include:

- Self-appraisal and self-assessment tools help direct teachers toward resources and course content that is personally relevant to them and their prior knowledge.
- Video clips model real-life classroom situations, helping teachers make connections between the theory and what they face on a day-to-day basis.
- Reflection questions trigger teachers to reflect on their experiences and beliefs. In addition, research-based lesson plans provide the opportunity to try new approaches with follow-up reflection on their efficacy.

Part One: Online Adult Learning (continued)

NSDC STANDARD: COLLABORATION

Effective staff development provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

Essential elements:

- Collaborative culture
- Interactivity
- Group development

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- "Engaging in reflection is a challenging process and is more effective when conducted among colleagues than when it is attempted in isolation. Online networks...bring together teachers who would otherwise never meet, but who could benefit from their mutual collaboration and interdependence. Networks serve as the scaffold for teacher learning; they reduce teacher isolation and provide the medium for reflection." (Gray, 1998, p. 26)
- "It is not only important to create an interactive environment for learning, but also important to design discussion activities that will trigger rich and meaningful online discourse." (Jiang & Ting, 1999, p. 4)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

A significant part of Connected Educator Reading is the dialogue among peers, both online and at their local site. Learners are encouraged to interact regularly in course discussions and in providing feedback to other course participants.

- Interactive exercises presented during the course create important learning opportunities that are then discussed either in the online discussion or local, face-to-face meetings.
- Connected Educator Reading provides the ability for school districts to build local communities of online learners and to customize content by combining online and face-to-face training, through the involvement of local reading specialists or staff development coordinators. This makes it possible for schools to provide a differentiated program tailored to local interests and needs.
- Course cohorts can be local to the district or can allow teachers to meet and learn from other teachers around the country.

Part One: Online Adult Learning (continued)

NSDC STANDARD: QUALITY TEACHING

Effective staff development deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to appropriately use various types of classroom assessments.

Essential elements:

- Alignment of curriculum, assessment, and instruction
- Adjusting for individual student needs
- Deep content knowledge

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- "Ongoing conversation and reflection about their practice, their students, theories of learning, assessment, technology, and how they might begin to change their classrooms" is an "important principle for staff development to be effective." (ACOT, n.d., Online)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

Connected Educator Reading provides learners with access to high quality content. Connected Educator Reading courses:

- Are built on the essential components of reading instruction that lead to increased student achievement, as put forth by the National Reading Panel.
- Bridge theory and practice with video-based modeling of classroom practices, interactive exercises, and model lesson plans, providing learners with varied instructional strategies to be applied in the classroom.
- Include critical information on assessment strategies linked to scientifically-based reading instruction.
- Provide information on ways to adapt learning to students with a variety of special needs, including English language learners.

Part Two: Reading Instruction

PUT READING FIRST ON PHONICS INSTRUCTION

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves kindergarten and first-grade children's word recognition and spelling.

Systematic phonics instruction produces the greatest impact on children's reading achievement when it begins in kindergarten or first grade.

(Put Reading First, p. 14)

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- "Children who were directly instructed in the alphabetic principle improved in word-reading skill at a significantly faster rate than children indirectly instructed in the alphabetic principle through exposure to literature." (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998, p. 51)
- "Children who became poor readers entered first grade with little phonemic awareness. By the end of fourth grade, the poor readers had still not achieved the level of decoding skill that the good readers had achieved at the beginning of second grade." (Juel, 1988, p. 437)
- "Teachers are often faced with a number of new teaching routines in a program of effective phonics instruction. Teachers may need as many as 20 opportunities to practice each routine before they are comfortable with it." (Moats, p. 17)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

In the Connected Educator Reading course Phonemic Awareness and Beginning Phonics, teachers learn ways to teach letter-sound correspondences sequentially and cumulatively and learn how they can be applied most effectively. Teachers practice concrete and practical activities they can take back to their classrooms. Topics include:

- What phonemic awareness and phonics are and why they matter
- Phonological sensitivity
- Research on when to move into phonics: how, when, and why
- Sequences of instruction on phonemic awareness and phonics
- Activities for teaching phonemic awareness and phonics
- Assessment and diagnosis tools in phonics instruction, including:
 - The importance of multiple forms of measurement
 - Formal and informal assessments
 - Using the results
- Intervention strategies
- Techniques to use with ELL and low-performing students

Part Two: Reading Instruction (continued)

In Building Basic Phonics Skills, teachers learn proven strategies for the explicit and systematic teaching of phonics skills, including word blending, word building, sight word recognition, and reading of connected text. Course topics include:

- Research that informs phonics as an instructional model
- How to turn research into sound instructional classroom practice
- Proven methods and strategies for teaching first grade phonics and decoding skills
- Basic phonics instruction
- Teaching complex letter-sound relations
- Teaching phonics in the context of reading and writing
- Assessment and remediation as it relates to phonics instruction

PUT READING FIRST ON TEXT COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

Text comprehension can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies.

The following six strategies appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension.

- Monitoring comprehension
- Using graphic and semantic organizers
- Answering questions
- Generating questions
- Recognizing story structure
- Summarizing

Metacognition can be defined as “thinking about thinking.” Good readers use metacognitive strategies to think about and have control over their reading. ...Comprehension monitoring, a critical part of metacognition, has received a great deal of attention in the reading research.

(Put Reading First, p. 49-53)

Part Two: Reading Instruction (continued)

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- “[I]nstruction in metacognitive reading strategies and techniques can be conducted utilizing group instruction in a regular classroom by a classroom teacher. In addition, children can be convinced to use such strategies on their own and, therefore, assume control of their own learning.” (Payne & Manning, 1992, p. 37)
- “[Teachers] can guide students to analyze the reading task, to make efficient plans for purposeful reading, and to use the appropriate strategies to enhance their ability to comprehend and reason from the text. ...the use of these metacognitive strategies can significantly enhance these important components of reading comprehension for students...” (Tregaskes & Daines, 1989, p. 58)
- “[S]tudents exposed to graphics organizers recalled significantly more than the control [groups] under the descriptive text condition for both immediate and delayed recall measures.” (Alvermann, 1981, p. 47)
- “[T]eaching students about story parts enables them to recognize and recall important elements in narrative selections. ...the results demonstrate that young children can be taught to employ a simplified story mapping heuristic as a means to enhance comprehension of important narrative elements in unfamiliar stories.” (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993, p. 431)
- “Teachers need as much help with comprehension instruction as they need with other components of reading. Often too much time is spent on literal questions that test literal comprehension, and too little time is spent on queries that focus discussion and engage students in thinking hard about what they read. Questioning strategies, however, can be learned with instruction, modeling, practice, and feedback. In addition, the strategies that work best before children read, while they are reading, and after they have read a text are important for teachers to understand and practice.” (Moats, p. 21)

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CLASSROOM CONNECT'S CONNECTED EDUCATOR READING

In *Introducing Text Comprehension*, teachers learn to develop students' ability to comprehend and think critically about the texts they read. Teachers learn proven strategies for helping their student to identify narrative elements of stories, and to identify and analyze relationships between ideas and nonfiction selections. Topics include:

- What research says about comprehension
- Comprehension monitoring and metacognition
- Importance of cooperative learning
- Strategies to use with expository text, including:
 - Graphic and semantic organizers
 - Answering questions
 - Generating questions
- Strategies to use with narrative text, including:
 - Story structure
 - Summarizing
 - Multiple-comprehension strategies
- Formal and informal assessments of text comprehension

Part Two: Reading Instruction (continued)

In Expanding Text Comprehension, teachers learn the best research-based strategies and techniques to improve students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Teachers learn practical strategies to help their students succeed in reading increasingly complex material in the context areas of social studies, science, and mathematics. Course topics include:

- Why text comprehension is important
- How to monitor comprehension
- How cooperative learning is helpful
- Useful comprehension strategies, including:
 - Using graphic aids and semantic organizers
 - Answering questions
 - Generating questions
 - Recognizing story structure
 - Summarizing
 - Using multiple comprehension strategies
- How to assess reading comprehension, both formally and informally

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About Classroom Connect

Classroom Connect is an award-winning provider of professional development programs and online instructional materials for K-12 education. Devoted to helping teachers become better teachers, Classroom Connect's products engage teachers in their own learning and inspire positive change in the classroom. Classroom Connect is a business unit within Harcourt Education.

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