

National Strategy for Early Literacy Presentation

Reading Skills Development: The Role and Education of Regular and Resource Teachers

Monique Brodeur, Éric Dion, Julien Mercier, Line Laplante
Université du Québec à Montréal

Monique Bournot-Trites
University of British Columbia

Montréal, le vendredi 20 mars 2009

Content

1. Introduction
2. Roles of Regular and Resource Teachers
3. Current Specific Education of Regular and Resource Teachers
4. Desirable Changes to the Role and Education
5. Strategies and Actions Required to Achieve these Changes
6. Conclusion

1. Introduction



« Frederick Bailey was born a slave in 1818. Fleeing North in 1838 and adopting the name Frederick Douglass, he became a prominent abolitionist speaker, writer, journalist and politician, and was the most famous black American of his time.

In 1845, he published his first autobiography - An American Slave, Written by Himself - describing his life as a slave and his emancipation, both physical and intellectual.

He recounts that upon acquiring the ability to read and write, he made full use of these powerful tools on the road to freedom.»

Without a doubt, the ability to read and write is one of the most wondrous skills one can possess. Indeed, people who can read and write are in a better position to adapt to and engage in the world around them (Douglass: Baillargeon et Santerre, 2007).

1. Introduction



Unfortunately, according to a major worldwide literacy study, the 2003 *International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, more than 4 out of 10 Canadian adults cannot read, write, perform simple arithmetic tasks or solve problems at the minimum levels required to fully participate in economic activity. For these adults, each day is filled with obstacles impeding their self-realization and their ability to contribute socially, culturally and economically to society.

Recent studies have shown that in most cases, adults with reading and writing difficulties started experiencing these difficulties as early as Kindergarten or first grade (Stanovich, 1986). Torgesen (2004) has demonstrated that students experiencing reading difficulties at the end of first grade almost never achieve average reading skills scores by the end of primary school.

From an individual rights and social justice point of view, school must have as its primary mission to provide each child with the support needed to successfully develop proper reading skills, as early as possible. To achieve this mission, Stanovich (1994, 2000) underscores the need to take scientific research into account.

2. Roles of Regular and Resource Teachers



The development of reading instruction skills starts at the very beginning of initial teacher education and continues throughout the teaching professional's career.

Pre-service teacher education

The education of regular and resource teachers in the area of reading instruction varies from one province to the next, as teacher education is under provincial responsibility.

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE, 2006) recently produced the *Accord on Initial Teacher Education*, with the intent of achieving a greater harmonization of teacher education programs in all Canadian provinces.

The design and implementation of teacher education programs lies with the universities, subject to accreditation by the relevant Ministry of Education.

The content and format of individual courses within these programs are defined by the university professors and instructors. It has been shown that courses are not always in step with current research findings (Pierre, 2003).

3. Current Specific Education of Regular and Resource Teachers



The development of reading instruction skills starts at the very beginning of initial teacher education and continues throughout the teaching professional's career.

Pre-service teacher education

The education of regular and resource teachers in the area of reading instruction varies from one province to the next, as teacher education is under provincial responsibility.

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE, 2006) recently produced the *Accord on Initial Teacher Education*, with the intent of achieving a greater harmonization of teacher education programs in all Canadian provinces.

The design and implementation of teacher education programs lies with the universities, subject to accreditation by the relevant Ministry of Education.

The content and format of individual courses within these programs are defined by the university professors and instructors. It has been shown that courses are not always in step with current research findings (Pierre, 2003).

3. Current Specific Education of Regular and Resource Teachers



Although course outlines may be very similar, since courses are taught by different teachers, considerable disparities have been observed in terms of actual education received by student teachers in some areas.

The choice of course format is determined by the lecturer's educational approach and beliefs, and is influenced by the number of students enrolled, which can reach 50 or more.

Within special education, although resource teachers obtain an incomplete education, some of the graduates are often hired into resource teachers' positions.

In immersion, the lack of in-depth education in the area of learning difficulties has a negative impact on the effectiveness of pre-service teacher education.

3. Current Specific Education of Regular and Resource Teachers



In-service teacher education

Professional development activities focus on different aspects of the teaching profession; they use a broad range of approaches and rely more or less on research-based information.

Very often, these activities are packed into a few days, with no follow-up or classroom support.

All in all, despite a common willingness to reinforce the importance of professional development, there remains a lack of a cohesive, long-term vision for professional development on behalf of all stakeholders, along with the absence of a collective commitment to research-based professional development practices.

However, recent initiatives, such as the Ontario Education Research Panel (OERP) are providing new opportunities for increased cooperation between key stakeholders to improve in-service professional development.

4. Desirable Changes to the Role and Education



A research-based model for reading instruction and acquisition

Despite efforts by different education stakeholders, the percentage of students struggling to learn to read remains high.

The advanced state of knowledge has led to a definition of an environment for reading instruction and acquisition that can support these students effectively.

The *Three-tier model for reading instruction and acquisition* (Three-Tier Model, Haager et al., 2007) is one of the most promising models to better support each student's success in learning to read.

This model places emphasis on the systematic monitoring and evaluation of students. All stakeholders must work together for its successful implementation.

4. Desirable Changes to the Role and Education



Changes to roles

In this model, regular and resource teachers play specific and complementary roles.

Regular classroom teachers implement research-based practices. Following these interventions, regular classroom teachers identify students with reading difficulties who might benefit from a more tailored second-tier intervention.

Resource teachers, for their part, are responsible for more specialized interventions that correspond to the second and third tiers of the model.

Changes to pre-service and in-service education programs

Teacher education must be based on research. Recent literacy research should serve as the foundation for the different courses offered.

For in-service programs, a partnership between universities and the education community should be promoted in order that the competencies developed within courses be transferred into practice.

As for resource teachers, the nature of their role requires graduate studies in special education.

4. Desirable Changes to the Role and Education



Self-regulated learning process

Regular and resource teachers benefit from self-regulated learning, a key process in their professional development. This process, which requires some effort, consists of planning, controlling and evaluating one's learning in order to maximize it.

Teacher education format

Modelling, which consists of observing a model completing a particular task to be learned, is a preferred approach for developing professional skills.

5. Strategies and Actions Required to Achieve these Changes



Planning implementation

We propose that a collective objective be the implementation of the *Three-tier model for reading instruction and acquisition* in Canadian school settings.

In order to progress toward this goal in a socially and scientifically responsible manner (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998), we recommend that implementation be carried out in three stages:

- 1. carry out pilot studies on the implementation of the model in several schools
- 2. after making the necessary adjustments, conduct experimental research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the model's implementation
- 3. when the conditions of the model's implementation are found to be positive, expand the implementation to all primary schools offering Kindergarten to Grade 3

The implementation of the model requires the contribution of different stakeholders in the education system, namely at the school, government and university levels. The various stakeholder groups must be encouraged to develop self-efficacy beliefs, as this is essential to their collective capacity to actively improve the quality of reading instruction and acquisition.

5. Strategies and Actions Required to Achieve these Changes



Contribution of stakeholders

Regular, special education, immersion and resource teachers

- Self-regulated learning related to professional development.
- Implementation of research-based practices with all students and those having special needs.
- Assessment of students using proven tools, from the beginning of the year, in order to identify students who are struggling.

School administration

- Leadership in the organization of student support services, education and support for regular and resource teachers.
- Support for the organization of student support services, for the education and assistance of regular and resource teachers.
- Staffing special education positions with properly trained resource teachers.

Ministries of Education and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

- Leadership in making literacy a priority.
- Adjustment to curriculum related to reading instruction based on research results.
- Support for research related to regular teachers' and resource teachers' education and to reading instruction and acquisition.
- Support for favourable education conditions for regular and resource teachers.

Governments

- Leadership in making literacy a priority and adoption of a policy to that effect.
- Sufficient funding for the education community.
- Sufficient funding for universities, particularly for teacher and special education programs.

Contribution of university stakeholders

- Courses, with research-based content, related to pre-service and in-service education
- Production and publication of research in scientific and professional journals and knowledge mobilization
- Creation of favourable conditions for research and courses related to reading instruction and acquisition.

6. Conclusion



It is crucial that all stakeholders in the education community work together to benefit from discoveries stemming from research in order to effectively support reading skills acquisition.

The same goes for the academic success and social integration of many students.

On the same note, it can be quite interesting and reassuring for regular and resource teachers to be able to rely on research results to guide their decisions related to approaches to take in responding to the needs of emergent readers and in justifying their practices, especially with parents.

Given that research-based knowledge is a permanent action plan must therefore be initiated and updated regularly, in order to ensure maximum quality of the initial and ongoing education of regular and resource teachers in the field of reading instruction and acquisition.

Such work can only be undertaken by a discerning, committed and united education community.