

How *Jamestown Reading Navigator*<sup>™</sup>  
Supports Research-Based Instruction  
for Struggling Adolescent Readers

# Text-Based Collaborative Learning

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## About This Paper

This paper presents research-supported best practices related to instruction of struggling adolescent readers—that is, students in grades 6–12 who are reading at least two levels below grade level—and describes how *Jamestown Reading Navigator*<sup>™</sup> supports those practices.

### What Is *Jamestown Reading Navigator*?

*Jamestown Reading Navigator* is a reading intervention program designed specifically for students in grades 6–12 who are reading two or more reading levels below their grade in school. The program provides direct, explicit instruction and modeling of good reading practices, together with opportunities for students to practice and apply these reading strategies.

*Jamestown Reading Navigator* combines online activities featuring interactive multimedia for students to complete; engaging and appropriate online and print texts for students to read; an audio component for further guided or independent study; student writing in response to reading; student recording of fluency passages; an assessment program to monitor students' progress; an independent measure of progress monitoring; and teacher support materials, including professional development, lesson plans, instructional recommendations, and reteaching skills support. Major areas of focus for *Jamestown Reading Navigator* include

- Comprehension skills and strategies, designed for application to content-area reading
- Vocabulary
- Writing
- Fluency
- Decoding/phonics (for students with a particular need in this area)

The *Jamestown Reading Navigator* Learner Management System helps teachers manage individual student learning and provides ongoing, up-to-the-minute information on how students are performing. Online professional development modules and on-site professional development sessions offered by Jamestown Education help educators—teachers, administrators, literacy specialists, and others—learn how to implement *Jamestown Reading Navigator* more effectively. These sessions also provide information and suggestions to help educators develop effective strategies for working with struggling adolescent readers.

*Jamestown Reading Navigator* has been developed based on the most up-to-date research and expert thinking in adolescent literacy, drawing on more than 30 years of experience in reaching adolescent readers with the popular Jamestown Education print series. This paper describes the match between *Jamestown Reading Navigator* and the best available instructional thinking in a variety of specific areas that are important to the success of struggling adolescent readers, as described below.

## Introduction

### A Critical Need to Support Struggling Adolescent Readers

Problems with literacy have serious and long-lasting consequences. A lack of literacy skills is “one of the most commonly cited reasons” for students to drop out of school (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 7). A resource guide on adolescent literacy prepared for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory described the problem as follows:

For secondary-level students . . . the social and economic consequences of not reading well can be cumulative and profound: the failure to attain a high school diploma, a barrier to higher education, underemployment or unemployment, and difficulty in managing personal and family life. Years of failing at what is deemed a hallmark of intelligence and worth can also leave struggling readers with emotional consequences, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, that affect personality and interpersonal relationships. These effects within and beyond the classroom walls show that by the secondary grades educators can no longer defer solutions to future development or instruction. (Peterson et al., 2000, p. 6)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peterson et al. (2000) is laid out in a paginated PDF format, but the format does not include page numbers. Page references for quotes from Peterson et al. (2000) that are given in this paper have therefore been calculated on the basis of page numbers shown in the document table of contents.

Numerous sources attest to the scope of the challenge. *Reading Next* cited both results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the opinions of experts in adolescent literacy that “as many as 70 percent of students struggle with reading in some manner” that requires instruction differentiated for their specific needs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 8, citing Loomis & Bourque, 2001; NCES, 1999, 2006; Olson, 2006).

Adolescents struggle with literacy for a variety of reasons. For some, English may not be their first language. Others may have mild learning disabilities. In many cases, students may simply lack experience and skill with reading. Unfortunately, difficulties in reading don’t cure themselves, but instead tend to get worse as students get older—a phenomenon reading experts refer to as the “Matthew Effect” (Stanovich, 1986). These students need literacy instruction that addresses the specific challenges they face, using the best available research-based methods and principles, in order to improve their chances of succeeding both during school and afterward.

### The State of Research on Struggling Adolescent Readers

Over the last two decades, attempts to improve student literacy on the national level have focused largely on elementary instruction, and particularly on early literacy—that is, literacy at the primary grades. For example, the focus of the Reading First initiative was on improving literacy at the primary levels. Recently, however, a number of efforts—including research summaries for a variety of sources, publication of the *Reading Next* report and other documents from the Alliance for Excellent Education, and position statements from organizations such as the National Reading Conference and the International Reading Association—have helped create a higher profile for instructional issues related to adolescent readers, and particularly the large proportion of adolescents who struggle with reading.

Initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act have raised expectations for instruction. Instruction is expected to be backed with solid research that concludes it is likely to result in the desired impact on student learning. Unfortunately, research on what constitutes effective literacy instruction for adolescents is still limited. According to the editors of a volume intended to “compile from the best researchers in the field a summary and synthesis of adolescent literacy research and practice,”

As of 2003, there is not a body of research to tell us appropriate interventions that will help struggling middle and secondary school readers who can barely read. As of 2003, we still do not have a body of research to provide us with appropriate interventions to help high school readers who can read fluently but remain 3 or 4 years below grade level in reading. (Jetton & Dole, 2004, p. 6)

Although research on what constitutes effective literacy instruction for adolescents is limited in significant ways, there is substantial support in research and expert opinion for a variety of specific instructional recommendations. The state of knowledge with regard to effective instruction for struggling adolescent readers fits the description of *best available evidence* as characterized by U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary Grover J. Whitehurst: that is, “the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction” (Whitehurst, 2002).

### The Reading Next Report

A critical milestone in recent efforts to highlight the challenges related to adolescent literacy was the publication of *Reading Next*, a report to Carnegie Corporation of New York focusing on the needs of adolescent readers (defined in the report as those in grades 4–12), with a special emphasis on the needs of struggling readers. Preparation of this report included the following steps.

- A panel of five nationally known and respected educational researchers was convened in spring 2004, together with representatives of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education.
- These panelists drew up a set of recommendations for how to meet the needs of struggling readers, including 15 specific elements of effective adolescent literacy programs that had “a substantial base in research and/or professional opinion” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 12). These included both elements with an instructional focus and recommended infrastructure elements to improve adolescent literacy.

- The resulting paper was reviewed and augmented at the 2004 meeting of the Adolescent Literacy Funders Forum (ALFF).
- An Appendix was compiled of literature supporting each of the report’s main recommendations.
- In 2006, a second edition of the report was published.

The *Reading Next* recommendations thus represented a synthesis of research-informed expert opinion that serves as an important touchstone for much of what is known about effective adolescent literacy instruction. Several caveats, however, are in order with regard to using the recommendations as a yardstick for measuring instructional programs in general, and *Jamestown Reading Navigator* in particular.

- While all 15 elements identified by *Reading Next* are characterized as having “a substantial base in research and/or professional opinion” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 12), the report nonetheless cautions that “the optimal mix of these factors has yet to be determined. . . . Nor does the remediation of adolescent literacy difficulties involve indiscriminately layering on all fifteen key elements. Choices should be matched to school and student needs” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 29). The expectation is not that each literacy program should necessarily include all 15 elements, but that developers and adopters of such programs should select those elements that seem best matched to their specific circumstances.
- The focus of *Reading Next* is explicitly on “the large population of struggling students who already decode accurately but still struggle with reading and writing after third grade” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 11). The report thus does not include recommendations related to areas such as decoding and fluency that may be important for readers who are struggling at a more basic level.
- Several of the elements of *Reading Next* relate to how infrastructure impacts adolescent literacy learning. The most that any purchased instructional program can do in these areas is to provide support to schools and districts as they implement these elements.

#### Development of This Paper

Development of this research-based white paper included the following steps.

- A top-level review of *Reading Next* was conducted to identify claims and recommended practices, including both those that are associated with the 15 key elements of adolescent literacy identified in the report and those that appear elsewhere in the report. As part of this review, information was collected about the sources in the Appendix to *Reading Next*, which listed literature supporting each of the 15 key elements.
- Well-known experts in the field of adolescent literacy were consulted to identify key, current, and reputable sources related to instruction for struggling adolescent readers. These included both experts who had been consulted during the development of *Jamestown Reading Navigator* and an independent expert not previously associated with the program.<sup>2</sup>
- Key documents were identified for review, with priority given to two types of documents:
  - *Broad policy-oriented research reviews and surveys of expert opinion, developed by reputable institutions and authors, with a goal of identifying key elements in effective adolescent literacy programs*
  - *More focused research syntheses and meta-analyses from reputable sources, describing the state of research and/or theory related to a specific relevant topic in adolescent literacy (e.g., comprehension, writing, formative assessment)*

<sup>2</sup> Key contributors included Dr. Thomas W. Bean, professor in literacy/reading and coordinator of doctoral studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Nevada at Las Vegas; Dr. William G. Brozo, professor of literacy, Graduate School of Education, George Mason University; and Dr. Douglas Fisher, professor of language and literacy education, San Diego State University. Drs. Brozo and Fisher had previously consulted with the development team for *Jamestown Reading Navigator*. These experts provided input into interpretation of the research literature, as well as recommendations of sources to review, but are not responsible for writing the summaries of the literature or for developing the correlations of the instructional recommendations to *Jamestown Reading Navigator*.

In addition to these two types of documents, some specific research reports were also identified for review, in the case of studies that were particularly germane to topics under investigation.

- Sources were reviewed and summarized, with special reference to
  - *Specific instructional recommendations*
  - *The nature of the evidence supporting each recommendation*
- Instructional recommendations were consolidated from multiple sources.
- Cross-comparison of the research-based recommendations and *Jamestown Reading Navigator* verified that *Jamestown Reading Navigator* supports each research-based recommendation listed in this paper.

In the final paper as presented here, each section spells out specific instructional recommendations that are supported by a mix of research and expert opinion. A table then provides information on how *Jamestown Reading Navigator* aligns with each recommendation.

Key policy-oriented documents and research syntheses that were reviewed for this paper are listed in the References section of the complete White Paper.

## TEXT-BASED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

“Another element [of effective adolescent literacy programs] is text-based collaborative learning, which means that when students work in small groups, they should not simply discuss a topic, *but interact with each other around a text.*”—*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 17; emphasis in original)

### What Is Text-Based Collaborative Learning?

Text-based collaborative learning represents an intersection of student interaction with texts—that is, student literacy activities—and collaboration with peers. Describing text-based collaborative learning, the authors of *Reading Next* stated,

[W]hen students work in small groups, they should not simply discuss a topic, but interact with each other around a text. . . . Learning is decentralized in these groups because the meaning drawn from a text or multiple texts is negotiated through a group process. (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 17)

### Why Should Students Collaborate over Texts?

Researchers have identified a variety of benefits from having students interact and collaborate with each other as they are reading and interpreting texts. For example, according to Nokes and Dole’s (2004) research synthesis, some researchers claim that

allowing students to work in groups is critical during the guided practice phase of explicit strategy instruction. Social collaboration has been shown to be extremely motivating in regard to strategy use (Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, & Rhinehart, 1999; Swan, 2003). Pressley (2002) contends that small-group practice is a key to the internalization of a strategy. It seems that students working in groups are forced to defend their choice of strategy and to explain their cognitive processes. Such interaction provides a review of the declarative, conditional, and procedural knowledge for both the explainer and the listener. Hacker (1998) contends that . . . [a]llowing students to work in groups provides learners with a source of feedback outside of their closed system, increasing the likelihood that errors will be detected and corrected. (pp. 169–170)

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), while cautioning that “intervention studies comparing more and less socially supportive contexts . . . are relatively rare” (p. 414), nonetheless identified a number of positive effects from collaboration related to student motivation and engagement based on analyses of teacher practice and belief, including “increase[d] interest in the content of learning,” active learning over an extended period, and a greater disposition to “read more independently in the future” (pp. 413–414, citing Hootstein, 1995; Morrow, 1996; Nolen & Nichols, 1994; Zahorik, 1996). Along similar lines, Guthrie (2004) stated,

The fourth ingredient [of a dynamic context to support comprehension strategy instruction] is classroom discourse among students. Nearly all students are enthralled with talking about themselves. They may be induced to discuss content deeply when asked to exchange their reactions to a text. . . . The classroom is a social environment and the extremes are hazardous. If no social interchange is allowed, students’ cognitive efforts to read and understand evaporate quickly. On the other extreme, endless talk about a sentence or paragraph may be enjoyable, but it will distract from the extended text interaction needed for improved comprehension. (p. 10)

In its analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental research on specific comprehension strategies, the National Reading Panel identified cooperative learning, which it defined as including strategies in which “peers instruct or interact over the use of reading strategies” (NICHHD, 2000, p. 4-45), as a strategy that had “a firm scientific basis for concluding that [it] improve[s] comprehension in normal readers” (NICHHD, 2000, p. 4-42, based on 10 studies across grades 3–6).<sup>3</sup>

A particularly noteworthy study related to text-based collaboration for adolescent readers was conducted by Langer (2001). Over five years, Langer compared high-performing schools in four states with typically performing schools from the same demographic group, as measured by scores on “literacy-related test data that carried high stakes for the students, the school, and the district” (p. 844).<sup>4</sup> One of the differences Langer noted between high-performing schools and typical schools was that in the high-performing schools, “Students work[ed] together to develop depth and complexity of understanding in interaction with others,” while in the typical schools, “Students work[ed] alone, in groups, or with the teacher to get the work done, but [did] not engage in rich discussion of ideas” (p. 857). Based on a combination of data from “interviews, observations, ongoing conversations (e-mail or telephone), and student reports” (pp. 854–855) collected over two years for each teacher, Langer determined that

- 96 percent of the teachers in high-performing schools typically used a “shared cognition” approach in introducing new language or literacy skills, in which “the varied contributions of the participants allow the group to achieve more than individuals could on their own” (p. 843), as opposed to 4 percent who used an individual thinking approach.
- 100 percent of teachers in typical schools who had been identified as high performing used a shared cognition approach.
- Only 8 percent of the typical teachers in typical schools used a shared cognition approach. The other 92 percent used an individual thinking approach. (p. 858)

3 Bramlett, 1994; Guthrie et al., 1996; Judy, Alexander, Kulikowich, & Wilson, 1988; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Mathes et al., 1994; Pickens & McNaughton, 1988; Soriano, Vidal-Abarca, & Miranda, 1996; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987; Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991; Uttero, 1988.

4 The study involved 44 teachers and 88 classes from 25 schools (12 middle schools, 12 high schools, and 1 mixed), with a predominance of poor and diverse student bodies. Teachers were divided into three groups: teachers in high-performing schools (n = 26), high-performing teachers in typical schools (n = 6), and typical teachers in typical schools (n = 12). All the schools in the study, both those with typical scores and those with higher than typical scores, had been highly recommended by “university and school communities” as “places where professionals were working in interesting ways to improve student performance and test scores in English” (p. 844), and all the teachers had been recommended by district administrators as good teachers (pp. 851–852). Langer did not clearly spell out criteria for determining which teachers in typical schools were identified as high performing, instead explaining, “Over the years in which we worked in the schools, we came to understand the extent to which the teachers were affected by the larger context in terms of professional growth or malaise, or were achieving unusually good results in spite of the context in which they worked. This led us, eventually, to recognize three broad but distinct patterns within our sample of teachers: (a) exemplary teachers whose work was sustained, perhaps even created, by the supportive district and/or school context; (b) exemplary teachers in more typical schools who achieved their success due to professional contexts unrelated to the school and/or district (often through participation in professional organizations such as local affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and writing projects, and collaboration with local colleges and universities); and (c) teachers who were more typical, who did not beat the odds, who were dedicated to their students, but working within a system of traditions and expectations that did not lift them beyond the accomplishments of other comparable schools” (pp. 846, 849–850).

**Instructional Recommendations**

- **Reading and writing focus.** As previously noted, there is substantial support in research and expert opinion for having students collaborate in their interpretations of texts as a reading comprehension strategy. Additionally, the Reading Next authors claimed that students gain benefits from collaborating over their own writing. According to Reading Next, “[T]ext-based collaborative learning is effective in improving not only reading skills but also writing skills” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 17).
- **Contribution from all group members.** Reading Next presented a specific example of ways that students of different ability levels could collaborative over texts: “[S]tudents might read different texts about the Underground Railroad—each at his or her own reading level—and then present the ideas (rather than the plots) to the circle” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 17). This example suggests a general value to structuring collaborative tasks so that regardless of circumstances, all students in the group have something to contribute.
- **Student roles.** According to Reading Next, effective approaches to text-based collaborative learning require “that the teacher provide instruction about how to use time effectively, which means assigning roles within each group, at least initially, to ensure effective implementation” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 17).

**How Jamestown Reading Navigator Incorporates Text-Based Collaborative Learning**

The following table describes how *Jamestown Reading Navigator* incorporates text-based collaborative learning according to the guidelines described above.

| Summary of Text-Based Collaborative Learning Recommendations   | Application Through <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i>   |
|--|--|
| <p>Students should have opportunities to interact with each other in interpreting reading texts.</p> | <p><i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> provides multiple opportunities for students to interact with each other as they interpret texts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>inClass Readers</i> include end-of-selection questions for partner or small-group discussions.</li> <li>• The <i>inClass Reader Teacher Guide</i> also provides suggestions for literature circle activities and discussions in conjunction with many of the <i>inClass Reader</i> selections. These activities provide opportunities for students to discuss and interpret what they have read and how it relates to the guiding question for the quest (unit).</li> <li>• <i>Reteaching Skills Support</i> for Treks 2–4 includes small-group activities for interacting with text, for students who need additional instruction to help them learn specific skills.</li> <li>• The online professional development module on comprehension provides numerous suggestions for how to engage groups in collaborative activities before, during, and after reading. The vocabulary module also includes collaborative activities for learning vocabulary.</li> <li>• <i>Flexible Grouping: Strategies for Success</i> is a resource for teachers related to student grouping. This resource explains why flexible grouping is important for helping struggling adolescent readers; describes how grouping relates to the collaborative learning phase in the gradual release of responsibility model for teaching reading strategies; and provides specific recommended strategies for grouping students to collaborate in order to comprehend text.</li> </ul> <p>Professional development on the use of <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> print resources as part of text-based collaborative learning is provided as part of the on-site implementation and follow-up training. Additionally, several optional on-site professional development sessions provide teachers with strategies for conducting text-based collaborative learning activities with students.</p> |

Continued ➔

| Summary of Text-Based Collaborative Learning Recommendations   | Application Through Jamestown Reading Navigator   |
|--|---|
| <p>Students should have opportunities to discuss their own writing with other students.</p>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The section on Improving Writing in the <i>Teacher Resource Guide</i> includes recommendations for students working together in pairs and suggesting revisions to each other’s written work.</li> <li>• Lesson plans in the <i>Teacher Resource Guide</i> include activities in which students discuss and respond to each other’s writing, interact over their writing, and collaboratively complete portions of the writing process. Examples:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Have students read their speeches to a partner, using expression to make the speech convincing. Students should revise speeches based on partner’s comments.</li> <li>– Have students read their rough drafts to a partner, who will listen for vivid descriptions. Writers will revise if necessary.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A resource for teachers related to student grouping, in preparation for release in fall 2007, will include specific suggestions related to grouping students as they interact in response to each other’s writing.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Text-based collaboration should be organized so that all group members have something to contribute.</p>                      | <p><i>Flexible Grouping: Strategies for Success</i> is a resource for teachers related to student grouping. It includes suggestions on ways to structure text-based collaborative activities so that everyone has something to contribute.</p>  |
| <p>Teachers should assign roles as needed within student groups to improve success in carrying out collaborative activities.</p> | <p><i>Flexible Grouping: Strategies for Success</i> is a resource for teachers related to student grouping. It includes suggestions on assigning roles within groups.</p>   |

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