

# Research Précis

## CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING: Through Strategies for Literacy

**C**ontextualized learning refers to learning experiences that occur within or through the use of a specific setting, subject topic, event, or similar environment that provides context for the concept or phenomena being studied. The areas of the National Reading Panel Report evidence that most reference effectiveness of various literacy strategies for supporting contextualized learning are fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

### Fluency

Fluency has been defined as “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression.” It is widely believed to be the most neglected reading skill in schools, so much so that a 1995 study of 4<sup>th</sup> graders found 44% were disfluent; the same report showed a close relationship between fluency and reading comprehension. We have long held “practice” to be the best teacher. Schools have therefore encouraged independent reading, assuming that this method of practice would automatically result in fluency. However, the findings of the National Reading Panel did not agree. It found much more convincing results using repeated reading, radio reading, and other guided oral reading procedures. These procedures have clearly been shown to improve fluency and overall reading achievement, and are conducive to use by classroom volunteers.

#### During contextualized instruction...

Utilize reading fluency strategies such as peer reading, radio reading with inflection practice, and repeated reading; when possible, incorporate strategies for additional or parent-guided oral reading experiences.

### Vocabulary

Vocabulary occupies an important middle ground in learning to read. Reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader. The results of the National Reading Panel indicate that there is a need for direct instruction of vocabulary items required for a specific text, items should be those that the learner will find useful in many contexts, and computer technology can be used effectively to help teach vocabulary. Perhaps most importantly, the Panel found that dependence on a single method of vocabulary instruction would not result in optimal learning.

#### During contextualized instruction...

Utilize text-specific vocabulary instruction; seek opportunities to implement a combination of vocabulary instruction methods for optimal reading achievement.

### Text Comprehension

Comprehension is a complex process, perhaps because it is often viewed as the essence of reading. It is essential for both academic and life-long learning. Text comprehension has long been taught only in the context of reading

instruction, but there is much evidence that supports the formal teaching of comprehension strategies in the content areas, such as history and science. The National Reading Panel concludes that comprehension instruction can effectively motivate and teach readers to learn and use comprehension strategies and that these strategies, when used in combination, show gains on standardized comprehension tests. The Panel further upholds the use of a combination of strategies, along with teachers trained to use them, interacting with readers using texts that portray people and things as they really are.

#### During contextualized instruction...

Utilize graphic and semantic organizers, story structure and mapping, as well as “naturalistic” interaction.

#### About the National Reading Panel Report...

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was convened in 1997 to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. They provided a report that presented the NRP’s conclusions in December 2000, the *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*. They settled on the following topics of research for study:

1. Alphabetics
  - Phonemic Awareness Instruction
  - Phonics Instruction
2. Fluency
3. Comprehension
  - Vocabulary Instruction
  - Text Comprehension Instruction
  - Teacher Preparation and Comprehension Strategies Instruction
4. Teacher Education and Reading Instruction
5. Computer Technology and Reading Instruction