Core reading programs are instructional tools, not your total reading program

Some Basic Understandings About Core Reading Programs

- Core programs are based on research – reading research and market research.
- Core programs are conservative documents designed to reflect what schools and teachers want and to remain current with research and trends in education.
- New research efforts compete for space with instructional traditions and district and state department demands.
Some Basic Understandings About Core Reading Programs

- Is a core program a scripted approach to instruction or a collection of texts, tools, and instructional activities?

Core programs are good for:

- Establishing a base for themed instruction.
- Providing foundational lessons for decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, but teachers can and should expand upon them.
- Providing many good texts for modeling and guided practice, but not for independent reading.

Core programs are good for:

- Providing support, guidance, and structure for novice teachers, but not for teachers who are experienced and successful.
- Providing lessons and a structure for novice readers, but not the structure and the lessons for students aspiring for expertise and independence.
**Who creates core reading programs?**

- State departments of education and their reading standards
- At the publishing house
  - Senior editors/executives, editors, marketing executives
  - Authors
- At the development houses
  - Editors and freelance writers

**How core programs are created**

- Anthologies are written by noted children’s authors and leveled text by freelance writers.
- Lesson plans are designed by authors, editors and marketing professionals.
- Literature is selected by editors and by only a few authors.
- Lessons are written by editors and by freelance writers outside the publishing company.

**Selecting a program effectively**

- Study a few elements of each program in-depth; avoid a 45-minute survey of its elements.
  - Ask for complete program sets - not just the pretty sample box.
  - Closely evaluate the student anthology for interest, genre, and engagement.
  - Read and evaluate many leveled texts: look at length, genre, and interest.
Selecting a program effectively

- Map the scope and sequence of skills on paper. Then compare it to your district and state standards. Look for:
  - Sequence of the skills - utility
  - Massed and distributed practice
  - Frequency of practice - beware the term "spiral curriculum"

- Read some decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension lessons in depth.
  - Compare them to what you do well.
  - Compare them to each other.
  - Compare them to actual research studies.

- Examine Intervention Programs that accompany core programs with these criteria in mind:
  - Conspicuous strategy instruction
  - Mediated scaffolding
  - Strategy integration
  - Primed background knowledge
  - Judicious review
  - Well-paced instruction

IRA, 2010; Dewitz & Jones
Selecting a program effectively

- Pilot to evaluate the utility of the program; you will not be able to determine its impact. Look for:
  - Ease of use
  - Navigation
  - The degree you need to supplement the materials
Each teacher should pilot more than one program.

Selecting a program effectively

- See Reading Guide to Program Selection – GPS
- www.reading.org/General/Publications/Books/SupplementalContent/bk707_supplement.aspx

Should core programs be taught with fidelity?

- What should teachers be faithful to?
  - Texts, scope and sequence, instructional approaches, lesson plan structure?
- Evidence against the limits of fidelity
  - McGill-Franzen et al. (2006)
  - Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009)
  - Brenner and Hiebert (2010)
  - Piasta, Connor, et al. (2009)
Using Core Programs Well

10 Important Decisions

1. Create a Literate Environment
   - The environment instructs through the materials, the language, the materials, and the attitudes in the classroom. Teachers, not commercial programs, create this environment.

   Literacy is a habit and desire, not just a skill.
   - Surround the students with print – books, magazines, student-crafted print, teacher-crafted print.
   - The print created by teachers and students has power and importance.
   - Read books, talk about books, share books, and write books.
2. Read extensively outside the basal

“I have always believed that if one accepts the theory that the basal reading program must be used it should be adjusted to individual needs and that each child should be encouraged to move on into wider and more advanced material as rapidly as possible.”
Arthur Gates, 1964

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How Much do Students Read?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Total Words per Lesson/Week</th>
<th>Minutes per Day of Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HT (2003)</td>
<td>7,562</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMH (2003)</td>
<td>3,352</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF (2004)</td>
<td>4,338</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRA(2002)</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4,653</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brenner & Hiebert (2010)

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Texts In and Out of the Core

- Use the anthology or leveled books for modeling and guided practice.
- Use trade books, both fiction and nonfiction, to provide independent practice.
- Employ literature circles and book clubs along with the core program.
3. Differentiation of Instruction

- Teachers must differentiate
- Texts
- Time
- Tasks
- Teaching

**Differentiation provided and not provided in core programs**

- Core programs differentiate text by level, but good readers read more, and struggling readers read less.
- Only a very few core programs differentiate tasks for students.
- Only a very few core programs help teachers differentiate time.

4. Modify the scope and sequence as needed

- Scope of sequence of skills often does not match the needs of your students or the standards of your district or state.
Adjust phonemic awareness instruction to its developmental nature and the needs of your students.

Continue to re-teach the same phonics skills to students who struggle.

Ignore some core skills – grammar, writing, research skills.

Teach comprehension and vocabulary skills that align with district and state standards.

Limit the number of skills and strategies that you need to teach – less is more.
  - Drawing conclusions, making inferences, and making generalizations are the same skill with different labels.
  - Main ideas and details are not two different skills but two sides of the same coin (Dewitz, Jones, Leahy, 2009).

Core programs do not assume that students will grow in expertise as the year progresses. You must make their growth your goal.
  - By the middle of the year students should have some expertise in a core set of strategies.
  - Skills and strategies that require teacher support at the beginning of the year should not at the end of the year.
Use good children’s literature for your read-alouds, not the contrived text in the teacher’s edition.

- Read-alouds in core programs are short, and they often lack picture support, literary quality, engaging themes, and enriched vocabulary.
- Use children’s literature that complements the topics or themes of the unit or reading selections.
- Employ think-aloud procedures to develop vocabulary and model comprehension strategies.

Develop prior knowledge and augment the units that are in core reading programs.
Why Knowledge?

- Reading comprehension is built on knowledge, strategies, and motivation.
- Core programs do little to develop prior knowledge. Consider the following:
  
  "The movement of the moon around the Earth causes the level of the water along the seashore to rise and fall everyday. This is called the tide."
  
- What is missing from the explanation for tides?

Develop Knowledge

- Knowledge and strategies are essential for strong comprehension.
  - The core programs often fail to build knowledge prior to reading the selection by ignoring essential themes.
  - The units in core programs do not build knowledge from one selection to another.
  - Add instructional techniques like K-W-L, brainstorming, concept maps, and semantic maps.

7. Select Vocabulary Carefully

- The developers of your core program cannot know the specific vocabulary needs of your students.
Choosing Words for Thunder Cake

Taught in the program
- bolt
- lightening
- rumbled
- thunder
- weather
- horizon

Other words
- crowed
- ceased
- ingredients
- scurried
- jagged
- stride
- bellowed
- luscious
- glistened

Source: Polacco (1997)

Modifying Vocabulary Instruction

- Add or delete vocabulary words from those selected by the program developers.
- Select words that are:
  - central to the meaning of the passage
  - useful outside the passage
  - cannot be learned readily from context or through the use of morphological analysis
  - unknown to your students

8. Be more explicit than the program suggests

Explicit instruction requires that students know:
- What the strategy is
- How to do it
- When to do it
- Why it is important
Core programs frequently lack the explicitness that researchers recommend (Duffy et al, 1986). Therefore:

- Articulate a process for the strategy.
- Highlight the use of text clues necessary to perform the strategy.
- Develop charts that help students to remember to use the strategy.
- Model the strategy often.

Good Modeling

- Happens more than once.
- Happens before and while students are reading.
- Is done by teachers and students.
- Is accompanied by thinking aloud.
- Demands that you understand how you understand.
- Requires you to be introspective.

9. Develop strong guided reading lessons
Text discussion should focus on both the content and the process of comprehension.

- Students should be guided to use strategies to help with understanding the content.
  - How did that prediction help you understand the passage? How did you find that main idea? What helped you summarize that passage?

Guiding Students' Comprehension

- Teacher Planning
  - Read text to identify problems students will have comprehending the selection.
  - Pick out points where you plan to stop.
  - Pick out difficult parts. The places where the students are likely to have difficulty:
    - Difficult words and concepts
    - Complex sentences
    - Places where one idea must be linked to another
    - Inferences a reader must make
**Guiding Comprehension**

- Feel free to ignore the questions in the core reading program and develop your own.
- Replace basal questions with:
  - Reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984)
  - Questioning the Author (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 1997)
  - Transactional strategy instruction (Brown, Pressley & Van Meter, 1996)

**10. Use core assessments selectively**

- Weigh basal tests against all other assessments used in your school.
- Use informal assessment to match students to texts.
- Avoid end-of-selection tests.
- End-of-unit tests may provide useful measures of growth in comprehension.

**Programs and Teachers**

- Research has never shown that the program is more important than the teacher. Rather, we know that:
  - All teachers mold and modify the use of core reading programs to their beliefs (Baumann et al., 1998; Hoffman et al., 2004).
  - Knowledgeable teachers can improve instruction even with the most scripted programs (Piasta et al., 2009).
Programs and Teachers

- Moment-to-moment decisions about questioning, scaffolding influence the quality of student achievement.
- Core programs view instruction as a sequence of skills and texts. Teachers must view instruction by asking:
  - What is my vision for my students by the end of the year?
  - What kind of readers do I want them to be?
  - How will I get them there?
- Core programs are only one tool in that process.

Our Book—
Learn More On:

- Development of Core Reading Programs: Past & Present
- How to Study and Select a Core Reading Program
- How to Use Core Reading Programs Effectively
Contact info:
pdewitz@cstone.net
Order online at www.reading.org or call IRA customer service at 800-336-7323.

References

References (cont.)

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