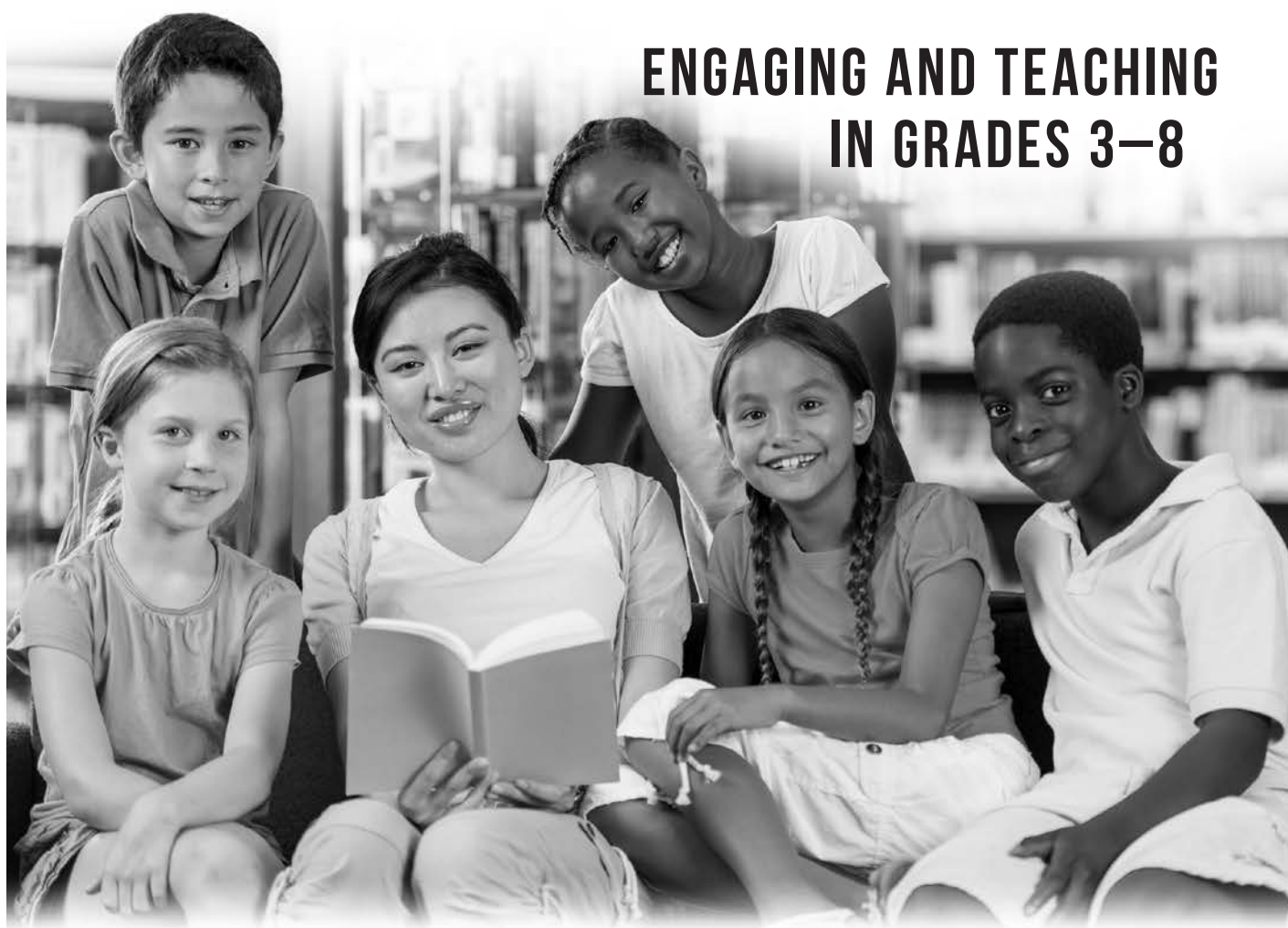


Struggling Readers

**ENGAGING AND TEACHING
IN GRADES 3–8**



Maureen McLaughlin
& Timothy V. Rasinski

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For Connor Michael Watkins

—MM

For Kathy

—TVR

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS	vii
-------------------	-----

PREFACE	ix
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CHAPTER 1	1
-----------	---

Struggling Readers, Knowledgeable Teachers

Struggling Readers	2
Knowledgeable Teachers	5
Creating Meaningful Contexts	8
Final Thoughts	9

CHAPTER 2	11
-----------	----

Motivation and Engagement

What Do We Know About Motivation and Engagement?	12
How Can We Motivate and Engage Struggling Readers?	12
Final Thoughts	22

CHAPTER 3	25
-----------	----

The Struggling Reader, the Text, and the Context

The Struggling Reader	26
The Text	28
The Context	33
Final Thoughts	34

CHAPTER 4	35
-----------	----

Phonics and Decoding

What Do We Know About Teaching Word Decoding?	36
How Can We Effectively Teach Word Decoding to Struggling Readers?	37
Final Thoughts	47

CHAPTER 5	49
-----------	----

Fluency

What Do We Know About Teaching Reading Fluency?	50
How Can We Teach Reading Fluency to Struggling Readers?	53
Final Thoughts	60

CHAPTER 6 62

Vocabulary

What Do We Know About Teaching Vocabulary?	63
How Can We Effectively Teach Vocabulary to Struggling Readers?	64
Final Thoughts	74

CHAPTER 7 76

Comprehending Narrative Texts

What Do We Know About Reading Comprehension?	77
How Can We Teach Comprehension Strategies for Narrative Text to Struggling Readers?	80
Final Thoughts	88

CHAPTER 8 90

Comprehending Informational Texts

What Do We Know About Comprehending Informational Text?	91
How Can We Teach Comprehension Strategies for Informational Text to Struggling Readers?	93
Final Thoughts	104

CHAPTER 9 106

Writing and Reading

Reading and Writing	107
How Can We Motivate and Engage Struggling Readers and Writers?	109
Final Thoughts	118

CHAPTER 10 120

Embracing Effective Instruction and Intervention

Future Directions	121
Our Final Thoughts	128

APPENDIX 131

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INDEX 155

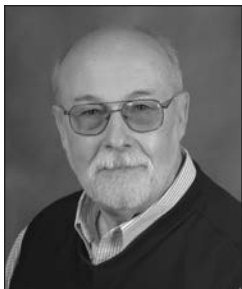
ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Maureen McLaughlin, a professor of reading at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, USA, was the 2013–2014 president of the International Reading Association (IRA). She was also the 2010 recipient of the IRA Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading Award, which honors an outstanding university professor who is an Association member and engaged in teacher preparation in reading at the graduate level. She was elected to serve on the IRA Board of Directors for 2005–2008 and again for 2011–2014.

Maureen earned her doctorate at Boston University in reading and language development and completed postgraduate study at New York University. Prior to her tenure at East Stroudsburg University, she spent 15 years as a classroom teacher, reading specialist, and department chair in a public school system.

Maureen has published 17 books throughout her career. She has also written numerous articles and chapters. She is the author of IRA's *Guided Comprehension in the Primary Grades* (2nd ed., 2010) and *Guided Comprehension in Grades 3–8* (2nd ed., 2009). She has published four books on the Common Core State Standards (including three for IRA in 2013), *Guided Comprehension for English Learners* (IRA, 2012), and *Content Area Reading: Teaching and Learning for College and Career Readiness* (Pearson, 2nd ed., 2015). Maureen is an educational consultant at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels.



Timothy V. Rasinski is a professor of literacy education at Kent State University, Ohio, USA. He has written over 150 articles and authored, coauthored, or edited more than 15 books or curricular programs on reading education. He is a coauthor of the award-winning K–3 fluency program called Fluency First! (Wright Group). His scholarly interests include reading fluency and word study, reading in the elementary and middle grades, and struggling readers. His research on reading has been cited by the National Reading Panel and has been published in journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Reading Psychology*, and *The Journal of Educational Research*.

Tim recently served a three-year term on the IRA Board of Directors, and from 1992 to 1999, he was coeditor of *The Reading Teacher*, the most widely read journal of literacy education. He currently serves as coeditor of the *Journal of Literacy Research*. He is also a past president of the College Reading Association and won the A.B. Herr Award from the College Reading Association in 1996 for his scholarly contributions to literacy education.

Prior to his tenure at Kent State University, Tim taught literacy education at the University of Georgia. He also taught for several years as an elementary and middle school classroom and Title I teacher in rural Nebraska.

PREFACE

Welcome to *Struggling Readers: Engaging and Teaching in Grades 3–8*! We are very eager to share our experience in teaching struggling readers with you.

As literacy professionals, seeking a greater understanding of struggling readers and how to teach them has emerged as an enduring interest for both of us. Questions that have frequently arisen in our teaching, as well as the professional development that we have done, include the following:

- What are the characteristics of struggling readers?
- What are the current beliefs about best practice in teaching struggling readers?
- How can we effectively integrate such ideas in our teaching?
- What can we do to ensure that our struggling readers will have successful literacy experiences?

When we teach our university classes, research aspects of literacy, and conduct professional development sessions, we strive to respond to these inquiries in meaningful ways. Theory, practice, and experience have informed our current thinking, which we have detailed for you in this volume.

We have been teaching struggling readers and their teachers for more than 80 years combined. During that time, a number of essential beliefs about teaching struggling readers have emerged:

- As teachers, we need to know our students.
- Motivation and engagement are essential components of teaching and learning.
- Multiple representations of thinking support individual preferences for expressing ideas.
- Understanding multiple aspects of literacy, as well as related skills and strategies, is vital.
- Reading and writing are inextricably linked, and discussion permeates both.
- Teaching, in its truest form, is an art.
- Our enduring goal is to ensure that struggling readers have successful literacy experiences.

We began our investigation of struggling readers by reviewing current research about best practice. This revealed that many readers struggle for a variety of reasons and typically have poor perceptions of themselves as readers. It also affirmed our belief that the best way to become a better reader is by reading. Research reports have shown that there are approximately 8 million middle school students who cannot comprehend, yet much of the literacy instruction that these students experience is prescribed skill and drill. The disparity between what was known about best practice and what we saw happening in literacy classrooms led us to write this book.

In this volume, we provide detailed descriptions of how to teach struggling readers in grades 3–8 to be successful readers. The book is a practical, easily accessed guide for classroom teachers, staff developers, Title I reading specialists, literacy coaches, and teacher educators. There are 10 chapters in this volume and an appendix of 25 graphic organizers that may be reproduced for classroom use. Samples of student work appear throughout the book. Please note that the names of teachers and students throughout the book are pseudonyms.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to our teaching beliefs. We begin by discussing the nature of struggling readers. We focus on the importance of knowing our students, their preferred modes of learning, and their need to represent their thinking in multiple ways. Then, we delineate the importance of being knowledgeable educators who teach through authentic tasks, engage in explicit instruction, and base instruction on the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.

Although the chapters are dedicated to different topics, Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 have been formatted similarly. They include theoretical background, practical teaching ideas, and Struggling Reader Connections—instructional experiences shared by classroom teachers, reading specialists, and literacy coaches.

Chapter 2 is entirely dedicated to motivating and engaging struggling readers, and Chapter 3 focuses on the struggling reader, the text, and the context. Fifteen different types of text are emphasized.

Chapter 4 addresses phonics and decoding. Fluency is the focus of Chapter 5, and vocabulary is emphasized in Chapter 6. All of the teaching ideas included in these chapters work for students at a variety of reading levels.

In Chapters 7 and 8, we emphasize comprehension of both narrative and informational texts, respectively. We discuss text structures and provide practical descriptions of each. We also detail a number of strategy applications designed to help students think through each type of text. In Chapter 9, we address writing and reading, two processes that we believe are inextricably linked.

In Chapter 10, we relate all that we have written to our long-standing belief that teaching is an art. We discuss its aesthetic nature and delineate its many outstanding features.

We have designed this book to be a comprehensive resource that contains what we believe to be the most current and best information about teaching struggling readers. We are very eager to share it with you and hope you will find it useful when teaching your struggling readers.

Acknowledgments

Although we have authored this book, we have had an impressive supporting cast throughout the research and writing process. We acknowledge them now for their contributions but most especially for their enthusiasm, their willingness to be action researchers, and their keen ability to find humor in looming deadlines. We are particularly grateful to the following people:

- Alexandria Gibb-Lucas, Pleasant Valley School District
- Shannon Baker, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

- Our families and friends
- Susanne Viscarra, Managing Editor, International Literacy Association
- Shannon Fortner, Director of Educational Resources, International Literacy Association

Finally, we thank you, our readers, for joining us in our search for greater understanding of struggling readers. We hope you find this book to be a valuable teaching resource, one that you and your colleagues will use to further our common goal of transforming struggling readers into successful ones.

—*MM and TVR*

