An integrated strategies approach: Making word identification instruction work for beginning readers

Here's an instructional framework for use with beginning readers that focuses on strategy development and the use of authentic, purposeful materials.

As he brings the paper closer to him, Randy scrutinizes the words on the list. He scrunches up his nose, then concentrates and studies the letters before him: "c-t-u-e." Finally he looks up and asks, "Don't that rhyme with blue?" When the teacher nods encouragement, he takes a chance and says clue. Delighted that his guess is confirmed, he moves down to the next word on the list, eager to continue.

Randy, a second grader who a few months before was able to read only a few words, has been part of an after-school tutoring program where he received direct instruction in word identification skills along with the opportunity to read quality children's literature. He is on his way to becoming a skilled reader, one who has acquired the strategies for decoding and making sense of text. Randy's success also demonstrates that a program that includes explicit instruction within the context of authentic literacy tasks can help beginning readers develop the skills, strategies, and attitudes they need to become independent readers.

Why do we need an Integrated Strategies Approach?

How best to teach children to read has long been debated. Adopting a balanced approach, one that includes direct, explicit instruction as well as extensive opportunities for authentic reading and writing, has been advocated by many reading educators for decades (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Chall, 1967; Spiegel, 1992, 1996). However, as the rhetoric surrounding beginning reading instruction heats up once again in combination with renewed public attention about the methods and effectiveness of various instructional programs, it is important that teachers understand the relevant research and instructional implications that support a balanced approach.

Learning to read is based on complex cognitive, emotional, social, and instructional factors (Lipson & Wixson, 1997). (For a detailed review of the research on beginning reading instruction, see Adams, 1990.) At the heart of being able to construct meaning is the ability to recognize words automatically. When children are able to decode words easily, attention...
can be devoted to comprehension and personal response; thus, reading is rewarding, fun, and becomes an activity of choice. Spending time reading books is also a type of self-initiated practice during which background knowledge and vocabulary are acquired and reading skill continues to be developed. These are the children who become the "good readers."

However, for those children who struggle with decoding, the task of reading can be very frustrating. Because reading is difficult, children's attitudes about it are often poor, and they avoid reading activities. When children don't read books, they fail to develop fluency and miss out on the opportunity to gain additional knowledge and vocabulary, which could help them in future reading experiences. As classroom demands increase and understanding texts becomes more dependent on students' background knowledge and vocabulary, children who have limited contact with books find decoding and comprehension of text increasingly difficult. Stanovich (1986) has explained these differences between skilled and unskilled readers as "the Matthew Effects," that is, "the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer."

The implications stemming from the Matthew Effects can be seen in the longitudinal data collected by Juel (1988), who found "the probability that a child would remain a poor reader at the end of fourth grade if the child was a poor reader at the end of first grade was .88" (p. 457). Many teachers working with middle-grade poor readers can identify children like the following-fourth-grade student who, when asked "Do you like to read?" responded with "I'd rather clean the mold around the bathtub than read a book" (Juel, 1988, p. 442). Embedded in this poignant anecdote could be the child's perception of herself as a poor reader, which may come from the fact that she has not unlocked the mysteries of decoding. Her attitude could, in part, stem from her lack of motivating literacy experiences. Inadequate phonics skills are only part of a poor reader's profile. Children need automatic decoding skills, but they also need to acquire the motivation that comes from engagement in purposeful, meaningful literacy tasks.

Many teachers feel as though they are at a crossroads, forced to choose between what seem to be competing instructional philosophies and programs. On the one hand, they cannot ignore the compelling data linking systematic, direct instruction in word identification, particularly phonics, to later success in reading (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Stahl, McKenna, & Panuccio, 1994; Stanovich, 1986). On the other hand, many teachers can easily embrace the argument that skills instruction in isolation is not in the best interests of students (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Routman, 1994; Strickland, 1994). Research confirms what many teachers have intuitively known: Providing time to read, choice in book selection, and the opportunity to discuss books with others are all important factors in children's motivation to read (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). Moreover, time spent reading is a key factor in developing reading skill.

What teachers want is a way to make sure they work toward the real goal of reading instruction: supporting readers who can read and choose to read because they love to read. They also want a framework that can help them make the bridge from theory to practice. Researchers from the National Reading Research Center conducted a study on the effectiveness of primary-grade reading instruction and reported that "the instruction of the very best teachers was characterized by a high level of balance" (Metsala et al., 1997, pp. 519–520). Equally important to point out is that the researchers found "the integration of skills instruction and authentic activities in these classrooms was deliberate and well planned" (p. 520).

The instructional approach proposed below helps teachers plan and implement instruction that blends effective and affective approaches so that "either/or" choices are avoided and students' opportunities for successful literacy learning are maximized. The
instruction outlined in this article is only a part of an overall reading-language arts framework that also includes developmentally appropriate instruction in comprehension and writing process, as well as time dedicated for authentic reading and writing. I hope that this description of the Integrated Strategies Approach helps teachers understand a research-based framework they can use to plan and implement lessons based on their own students' needs. A teaching "guide" is provided to help teachers understand the important metacognitive features of the program and to provide a sense for a teaching timeline, but ultimately it is up to individual teachers to plan, teach, and evaluate their students' progress and make modifications to the instructional program to best meet their students' needs.

What are the components of the Integrated Strategies Approach?

Ideas for the framework were borrowed and adapted from research and from descriptions of successful instructional programs, particularly those designed by Cunningham, Gaskins, and others at Benchmark School (Gaskins, Downer, Anderson, Cunningham, & others, 1988). I have named this framework the Integrated Strategies Approach (ISA). As in the Benchmark program, readers learn to identify many common words and to identify unknown words using letter-sound strategies in combination with other cues such as semantics, syntax, pictures, and background knowledge. Spelling is included to reinforce knowledge of words. In addition, teachers model and provide guided practice of word identification strategies within the context of connected text in an attempt to move word identification instruction beyond the isolated word level.

In comparison to the Benchmark program, which focuses on word study as a separate entity, in the ISA direct instruction in word identification is developed from the literature the teachers use with their students. Thus, systematic, structured word identification instruction becomes part of the broader language arts program, one that incorporates spelling, writing, and literature response activities. Instead of teaching words and word parts from a structured, prepared list, teachers choose words for study from their own curriculum. Word study may take place from literature selected by the teacher based on materials available, student interest, or curriculum tie-ins. For example, a teacher may have a variety of literature connected around the topic of weather and could use many words from the literature to support word identification instruction, as well as for learning weather-related vocabulary. Using literature and connected spelling and writing activities in conjunction with word study enables children to see a purpose and connection between the strategies they learn and how they apply to reading and writing.

The essential components of the program include (a) understanding rhyme, (b) learning key words and their spelling patterns (rhymes) to spell and decode new words by analogy (the teachers at Benchmark School have termed this the "compare/contrast" procedure), (c) learning to use the cross-checking strategy, and (d) learning to spell and read a core of high-frequency words. Instructional tools and techniques include (a) teacher modeling and student application of integrated strategy use, (b) using a Word Wall to support spelling and reading activities, (c) opportunities to practice strategy use in quality, developmentally appropriate children's literature, and (d) writing and other response activities that are naturally developed from the literature.

Understanding rhyme. Research consistently demonstrates that phonological awareness is an underlying prerequisite for early reading success (Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986; Stanovitch, 1986; Tunmer & Nesdale, 1988). If children are to make the most of instruction in how to use the alphabetic principle, they need to understand that words are made up of abstract units that can be manipulated. Studies have shown that children can benefit from phonological awareness training and subsequently improve their decoding skills (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Lundberg, Frost, & Petersen, 1988). Phonemic awareness skills vary in difficulty; some aspects have been linked to knowledge of print itself (Ehri, 1988). However, even the ability to detect and produce rhyme, a fundamental phonological skill that most children can easily grasp, has been linked to future reading success (Bradley & Bryant, 1983). For example, preschoolers' knowledge of popular nursery rhymes predicts
their development of later phonological skills (MacLean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987).

In the Integrated Strategies Approach, teachers review the concept of rhyming words or use rhyming games and activities based on children's needs. Reciting and acting out favorite rhymes, using puppet games to produce or identify rhyme pairs, reading aloud from texts that emphasize rhyme, and playing variations of popular children's games such as Bingo, Go Fish, and Memory are examples of how the concept can be developed. A classroom poster (see Figure) can be used to refer to when appropriate. Students who understand the concept of rhyme are able to make the most of the connection to rime, or knowledge of orthographic spelling patterns, which is described next.

Learning to use key words and their spelling patterns (rimes) to spell and read new words by analogy. Instruction that includes the use of onsets (consonant and consonant clusters) and rimes (vowels followed by consonants in a syllable) is supported by research indicating that readers look for letter patterns rather than individual letters as they decode words (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Robbins, 1992; Goswami, 1986, 1993). For example, it is easier for a child to segment sat into s-at rather than sa-t (Treiman, 1985). The basic idea of the analogy approach is that you can read an unknown word, such as splat, by knowing other similar and common words, such as cat and hat. This decoding technique is often termed the "word family," "phonogram," or "compare/contrast" approach and is based on the regularity of letter patterns, or rimes. A rime is a spelling pattern or cluster of letters that often occur together. These rimes help regularize the sound of the vowel(s) represented within the cluster. For example, the vowel e can have many different pronunciations, depending on which letters surround it (e.g., feather, fear), or on its placement in a word (e.g., even, mine).

However, when the vowel is constrained in a rime, such as -eep, its pronunciation is fairly consistent (e.g., in the words jeep, keep, peep-hole). Adams (1990) reported that "nearly 300 primary grade words can be derived from a set of only 37 rimes" (p. 321). Thus, when a reader comes upon a familiar rime in an unknown word, he or she can depend upon a fairly con-

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<th>Sample teaching posters</th>
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<td>Rhyming poster</td>
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<td>Spelling pattern poster</td>
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- **Rhyming words sound alike at the end**
- **A spelling pattern is the vowel and the letters that come after it**

<table>
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<th>Cross-checking poster or bookmark</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Look at the hard word.</td>
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<td>2. Try a word with the same beginning sound.</td>
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<td>3. Check your guess.</td>
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<td>Does it have the right sounds?</td>
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<td>&gt;at the beginning?&gt; for the spelling pattern?</td>
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<td>Does it make sense?</td>
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istent pronunciation for the rime. We call this the rime-rhyme connection.

In the ISL, teachers select one or two key words from the literature they want to use with children. These words become prototypes for the compare/contrast procedure. (See the list in Table 1 for suggestions.) When possible key words should contain common rhymes as students will be able to make more use of them to decode unfamiliar words (Leslie & Calhoon, 1995).

There are several teaching steps in the sequence of learning the rime-rhyme connection. First, children are taught to identify spelling patterns within words. Students are told to “look for a vowel and the letters that come after it” (see Figure). For example, in simple, one-syllable words like night, the lettersight form the spelling pattern. In more complex words, teachers model and children learn how to identify more than one pattern. They are taught that usually a new vowel signals a new pattern. For example, in the word wagon, there are two times, ag and on. In the word winter, children might identify patterns as in and er or int and er. After the children understand the concept of what a spelling pattern is, they are taught to use a key word and its rime and to spell and read easy words. For example, students learn to use the key word cake to spell and read shake. And, as children develop proficiency in spelling and decoding single syllable words, they are taught to apply the strategy to multisyllable words. For example, interesting might be spelled or decoded on the basis of (in) in + (her) ter + (best) est + (king) ing = in + ter + est + ing = interesting. Teachers model flexibility in using key words to pronounce harder words. For example, if decoding the word conductor, children would be coached to use a modified pronunciation for the first and last syllables to sound more like a word they know. In addition, children are coached to use cross-checking to monitor pronunciation of multisyllable words. (This is described in a section that follows.)

Reinforcing the concept of rime and linking this concept to the rime or spelling pattern helps children use the connection strategically when reading. When the child comes to an unfamiliar word, (a) she or he looks at the word and identifies the letters of the spelling pattern, (b) then she or he thinks of a known word with that spelling pattern, or she or he looks on the Word Wall for a word with that pattern, or the teacher provides a prompt such as “________ is a word with that pattern,” and (c) the child can then make a guess.

The following scenario highlights how the rime-rhyme connection can assist a child who is having trouble reading bark in the sentence The dog started to bark.

Child: O.K., the spelling pattern is "a-r-k" [saying the names of the letters; child then thinks of a word she or he knows with that pattern (e.g., shark) or looks up to the Word Wall and sees park; and then says park]; looks back at the text, and says the new word, bark.

Or the process occurs with teacher prompting:

Teacher: What’s the spelling pattern in this word?
Child: a-r-k.

Teacher: Good. Can you think of another word or find a word on the Wall with that pattern?
Child: (Finds park) Park.

Teacher: Good. So the word we want probably rhymes with park [points to the word]. What might this word be? Look at the first sound.

Child: Bark?
Teacher: Let’s see if that makes sense.
[Then the child rereads the sentence using the word bark, making sure that it fits the context.]

Once the child is prompted to use the strategy frequently, he or she can begin to apply it to words where specific patterns may not have been taught. For example, in the scenario at the beginning of this article, Randy read the word clue using the word blue, even though the -ue rime pattern had not been directly taught because of its low frequency. His behavior demonstrates that he now “owns” a strategy that he can use independently in new situations.

The rime-rhyme connection can also be used to support children’s development as spellers. When a child wants to spell an “unknown” word: (a) he or she is prompted to think of a word that rhymes with the word or looks for a word on the Word Wall that rhymes with the desired word or the teacher supplies a rhyming word, and (b) then the child or teacher writes the rhyming word above or next to the space for the desired word. The child now has a visual prompt (rime) and is able to spell the new word. For example, if a child wants to spell the word tight:

Teacher: So you want to spell the word tight. What’s a word that rhymes with sights?
An integrated strategies approach

An integrated strategies approach

Table 1
List of frequently used rimes/possible key words

The table lists words that have a high frequency in the text. Words that appear in three or more of the high-frequency lists are bolded. Words that appear in all of the high-frequency lists are italicized. Words that appear in at least one of the high-frequency lists are shown in black.

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### Table 1 (continued)

**List of frequently used rimes/possible key words**

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or

**Teacher:** Is there a word on the Word Wall that rhymes with *tight*? or [Teacher writes a rhyming word on the child’s paper]
What’s this word?

In each scenario presented above the child would respond with a rhyming word, such as *night*.
Then the teacher would ask: If this word is *night*, how do you think you should spell *ight*?

Including spelling and word-building activities is an important part of the instructional framework. In the ISA, in addition to using key words to decode words when reading, children learn to correctly spell key words as well as other words with the same rime pattern. This is done because spelling the words helps develop phonological skills as well as reinforces knowledge of specific letter-sound combinations. The rationale for including spelling in the instructional framework was confirmed by Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O’Hara, and Donnelly (1997) who found that some children were having difficulty using an analogy approach because they didn’t have a mental, visual representation of the key word. Teachers who use the ISA often have modified their formal spelling instruction so that it is based on the rime patterns they have selected for instruction. Some teachers let children contribute to the weekly list by encouraging them to find their own words, typically multisyllable, that contain the pattern. These words serve as bonus words and help provide challenge.

Teachers who have used or are currently using a word family approach may find the underlying rime-rhyme connection obvious. However, teachers shouldn’t assume that children will automatically apply the strategy to spell or read other words. When I taught third grade, I was surprised that many of the students I had considered to be good decoders in Grade 1 because they could read words off a list like *cat, fat, splat,* or *chat* had difficulty reading longer words like *scattered, satisfactory,* or *natural.* Once children are introduced to the strategy, teachers should look for opportunities to model how to use this knowledge to spell and read harder words, even in Grades 1 and 2. Teachers in Grades 3 and 4 should continue to model the strategy and help students apply it to multisyllable words. Cunningham (1996) presents other activities to extend word identification instruction beyond beginning-stage readers. Once again, when teachers use children’s literature to develop and apply the strategies, they make the word learning exercises more relevant.
Learning to use the cross-checking strategy. Although good readers are good decoders, they can also integrate the use of other cueing systems to make sense of text. Cross-checking involves using multiple cues to decode words and monitor comprehension. It includes letter-sound cues, word meaning cues, grammatical cues, prior knowledge, and in many books designed for the most beginning readers, picture cues. For example, when reading the sentence, The dog began to b--- at the cat, a child could use a variety of sources to help figure out the word. She or he could use the other words in the sentence (probably dog and cat), knowledge about how dogs and cats interact, the pictures of the dog situated beneath a frightened cat in a tree, or the initial consonant b with the spelling pattern ark to make an initial guess or confirm a guess for the word bark. Integrated use of cueing systems helps develop fluent reading (Adams, 1990; Clay, 1988).

In the Integrated Strategies Approach, teachers model how to use cross-checking and look for ways to have students apply the strategy in real reading tasks. We have found it helpful to display a teaching poster and to provide students with individual bookmarks outlining the steps of the strategy (see Figure). Basically, the steps include having students make the first sound of the unknown word, skip the word and read on, and then return to the word to look for other letter-clues that might work in conjunction with what makes sense in the sentence or passage. Complete lessons on using the cross-checking strategy should be taught early in the year and then modeled and applied in conjunction with daily lessons and activities.

As part of ISA, children find that using cross-checking can be especially helpful when decoding multisyllable words. They quickly learn to be flexible in pronouncing the various chunks. For example, when reading the word advantage in the sentence, Michael Jordan's skill and experience give him an advantage over most other players, students could use key words such as (had) ad + (man) van + (page) tage to come up with an initial pronunciation. However, when the children cross-check using the semantic clues from the sentence, they are most likely to modify pronunciation of the last chunk from tage to tij.

Children learn that using multiple cueing sources is a good strategy.

Learning core words. Core words, often called sight words, are those words that occur frequently and have less regular letter-sound correspondences. For example, the words have, where, and was are hard to decode and are among the most frequently used words in print. Being able to recognize these words automatically allows a reader to devote attention to decoding phonetically regular words (e.g., dog). In addition to being able to recognize the words, children learn to spell core words so that they can be easily incorporated into writing activities.

When using the ISA, teachers select core words for study from thematic units or the literature they are using. For a list of words commonly found in children's trade books, see Eeds (1980). Children learn to recognize and spell core words through various activities such as dictation tasks; chanting, clapping, or snapping fingers as the words are spelled out; cloze activities; and word bingo, word memory, and other games.

Teacher modeling and student application of strategies. As described above, direct explanation, modeling, and application of the component strategies is at the heart of the Integrated Strategies Approach. Students are also encouraged to “think-aloud” the strategy themselves as they apply it in writing and reading tasks. This provides reinforcement in an authentic and purposeful way. Children demonstrate more reading strategies with tasks that require them to form the problem and design solutions than with tasks that dictate the information to be used and the expected outcome (Turner, 1995). Research on effective classroom instruction includes explicit modeling as a key instructional technique (Ruddell, 1995; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). How much modeling needs to occur throughout a school year is based on children's needs.

Using a Word Wall. Cunningham (1996) has developed an extremely useful teaching tool that complements the Integrated Strategies Approach. Both core words and key words are placed on a large wall so they are available for students to use in word identification lessons and independent reading and writing activities. Words are written on construction paper shapes and mounted on a wall.
Key words have the spelling patterns underlined; core words are written on white and backed with black. See Cunningham’s (1996) book for many useful ideas about how to use Word Walls.

Using children’s literature as a basis for instruction. Research over the past several decades has linked frequency of reading with reading achievement and positive reading attitudes (Allen, Cipielewski, & Stanovich, 1992; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding 1988; and opportunities for response and extension activities. The literature choices include predictable books, poetry, and easy-to-read books. Big Books, poems transcribed on chart paper, individual copies of children’s trade books, or literature selections in basal anthologies are all good choices. The wide variety of children’s literature also makes it possible for teachers to integrate their word identification instruction into other areas of the curriculum, such as science or social studies.

Patterned language and predictable texts are good choices for beginning reading instruction because they contain rhyming patterns, repeated refrains, or repeated events. They can vary greatly in difficulty. For example, Have You Seen My Cat? by Eric Carle uses nine different words, while Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain, a cumulative African tale by Verna Aardema, is much more advanced, both in language and plot development. In both cases, however, the texts beg to be shared because of the excellent picture support, language suited for shared reading, and opportunities for rich discussion.

Poetry can also be used for word identification instruction. Young children love the humorous, rhyming verse created by poets such as Jack Prelutsky, Eve Merriam, Michael Rosen, and Shel Silverstein. Poems can be used to reinforce the concept of rhyme or for any other aspect of the Integrated Strategies Approach. Their typically short length makes them a good choice for teachers who have a limited supply of Big Books or multiple copies of appropriate prose. Their brevity also allows for short, concise lessons. Poems can be copied onto chart paper, or individual copies can be provided so that students have their own practice poetry anthologies. (Teachers should obtain permission from publishers before copying poems for students.)

A question that often comes up in selecting literature for instruction has to do with finding books to reinforce specific spelling patterns. How do you find literature that reinforces the pattern(s) you wish to teach? Although some patterned, predictable prose or poetry may repeat a particular spelling pattern frequently, most literature, even rhyming text, uses many different patterns. In fact, as mentioned above, limiting a complete text to

Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Greaney, 1980; Juel, 1988). Using quality literature that children can enjoy provides practice and purpose for learning word identification strategies as well as motivation to read. When asked why she liked the after-school tutoring program so much, Kayla replied, “Because you have good books, not boring ones.”

Most educators agree about the benefits of engaging children in reading activities both in and out of school, but some disagree about what kind of connected text provides the best practice for beginning readers. Some believe that children need to practice words and word parts so that they become overlearned (Anderson et al., 1985). But beginning texts do not need to be constricted: Pat can run the fat cat on the mat. Rather than facilitating practice, this type of text could undermine the use of balanced word identification strategies because the reader has little syntactic or semantic knowledge that can help construct or monitor meaning. Such text is also uninspiring.

Luckily, a rich body of children’s literature exists that can serve as the “right stuff” for the Integrated Strategies Approach, not only because it includes words that can be selected for instruction, but also because the literature contains rich language, good plot development,
repetition of one or two patterns may make decoding more difficult.

Instead of trying to find books that isolate a particular pattern, teachers search for literature they want to use for instruction because the children will love the story or characters or because the book fits into a classroom theme. Teachers select key and core words that are important to the story using the literature and words lists (e.g., Eeds, 1980) and the rime list in Table 1 as guides. Focused practice on targeted words can take place in teacher-created sentences as part of the direct instruction lesson. For example, in Have You Seen My Cat?, who, has, and seen might be core words and cat a key word. With Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain, these and heavy might be core words, and rain and sky would be good choices for key words.

Even easy-to-read texts can be a source for instruction. Good-quality, easy-to-read books such as Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures, Frog and Toad Are Friends, or Mr. Putter and Tabby Bake the Cake contain core words, words that can be decoded, and structures to support beginning and transitional readers: enlarged type, adequate picture support, fairly simple plot structures, and understandable vocabulary. With Henry and Mudge, a teacher might choose brother and friend for core words, along with smell and fear for key words because these are useful words that are integral to the text. Another benefit of easy-to-read books is that many are part of a series, and once children are introduced to one book, they usually enjoy other books from the series.

Teachers often share each selected text several times over the course of a week. This provides more opportunity to extend the literature and incorporate writing and other response activities. Quality literature that engages children can be used again and again. Repeated reading of texts is part of the Reading Recovery format and has been shown to be effective in developing fluency (Clay, 1994; Dowhower, 1989). Teachers should experiment with various types of choral reading patterns as they conduct the shared reading.

In addition to the literature used for instruction, teachers should have a well-stocked classroom library with materials children are able to read independently. Book clubs, donations from community groups, and relationships with community libraries are all effective means of establishing and maintaining an appropriate classroom library. Equally important is devoting part of each class day for recreational reading where children can read on their own or together with partners. This gives children more opportunities to apply skills and strategies in a purposeful way. At-home reading programs can provide the children with meaningful practice and involve parents in children’s reading development.

Writing and other response activities. The link between reading and writing achievement has been well documented (Allen & Cipielewski, 1996; Juel, 1988; Slootsky, 1984), and writing is a key ingredient of successful beginning reading programs (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Strickland, 1994). Writing in response to literature is a purposeful way for children to apply their word identification knowledge. As part of the Integrated Strategies Approach, children incorporate correct spellings of core words and use key words as they compose. Clarke (1988) found that first graders who were encouraged to use invented spelling in their writing wrote longer texts and became better decoders. Using literature as models for individual or class versions of the selections has also been encouraged as a scaffolded writing experience for beginning writers (Cramer, 1978; Routman, 1994). With the ISA, teachers are encouraged to develop meaningful response activities such as drama, art, and music and to include content-related activities in order to strengthen comprehension, develop personal response, and provide curriculum integration (Routman, 1994; Wood & Blanton, 1992). For example, after reading Mary Wore Her Red Dress and Henry Wore His Green Sneakers and selecting words for word identification instruction, children might act out the story, write a new version of the story, create invitations for a birthday party, or complete other related activities as the book is shared and revisited over the course of several days or even a week.

How do the components fit together?

Now that the essential components have been reviewed, how might teachers put them together for classroom instruction? As mentioned previously, word identification instruc-
tion is embedded within the context of reading and writing activities using a whole-part-whole instructional sequence (Hyamsfeld, 1989; Trachtenburg, 1990):

- Whole: Children are introduced to quality literature in which they read, comprehend, and respond to the entire text.
- Part: Words selected from the text are used for specific study and direct instruction, including spelling and decoding.
- Whole: Additional reading and writing activities allow children to apply the new skill or strategy. These activities include rereading the original text(s), reading other texts that provide practice for the new words (authentic literature and teacher- and class-created texts), and writing activities that encourage children to use the new words.

A strength of the Integrated Strategies Approach is the emphasis on teacher decision making. Using quality children's trade books or quality selections from basal materials as described previously, teachers choose key words and core words for direct instruction. We have found that two or three core words and one or two key words work well for each selected text. An overall 2-day instructional sequence (see Table 2) and detailed suggested lesson plans using Silly Sally (see Table 3) illustrate how the components of the ISA fit together and highlight how metacognition is included in the teaching sequence.

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<thead>
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<th>Table 2</th>
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<td>Sample instructional sequence</td>
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**Day 1**

**Whole:** Do a shared reading of the selected text according to students' reading level: choral read, echo read, reread the text several times.

**Part:**
1. Reinforce phonemic awareness with games and activities (optional).
2. Introduce the core and key words in context. The context you use can be from the original text, or from a text you create.
3. Let children write the new words and chant, clap, or snap out the letters for each of the words.
4. Put the new words on the Word Wall.
5. Optional: games and other activities that reinforce the new words.

**Whole:**
1. Provide additional practice reading the words by
   (a) returning for another group reading of the text;
   (b) reading the words in a teacher-created text; or
   (c) reading another related text that uses the words.
2. Develop response activities for the book.

**Day 2:**

**Whole:** Shared reading of the original text used on Day 1.

**Part:**
1. Review key and core words. Have children write and spell the words.
2. Use the compare/contrast procedure:
   (a) identifying the spelling pattern;
   (b) make the rhyme-rihyme connection;
   (c) student builds words (spelling);
   (d) teacher models compare/contrast and cross-checking;
   (e) students read new words in isolation and/or context; and
   (f) teacher reiterates purpose of strategy and elicits student understanding.

**Whole:**
1. Students practice cross-checking and compare/contrast by reading new words in context. Teachers look for opportunities to have students demonstrate their knowledge about using compare/contrast and cross-checking. For example: "Tommy, how did you know that word was ___?" "Why couldn't it be ___?"
2. Develop additional response activities for book.
### Table 3

**Proposed lesson plans**

The following lessons using *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood are described in more detail below to highlight key instructional steps.

#### Day 1

**Purpose:** To reinforce phonemic awareness; introduce core and key words.

**Materials:** *Silly Sally* word cards on shapes for key words: pig, down, and core words: went, they; sentence strips with sentences and words from the text; teacher-prepared sentences written on chart paper or individual worksheets; puppets for rereading.

**Instruction:**

- **Whole:** Introduce and read the book *Silly Sally* several times with the children. Discuss the story.
- **Part:** Phonemic awareness activities (optional). Play a rhyming game or other game to reinforce how words sound at the beginning, middle, and end.
  - Teach target words:
    1. Introduce each core word and each key word in a sentence from the text with the word highlighted.
    2. After each word is read in context, show the target word on its word shape; discuss how the word looks with the children; children can chart the letters of the word, copy it down, etc.
    3. Children read new sentences that include the target words.
    4. Game(s) to practice identifying the target words (optional).
- **Whole:** 1. Children read new words in an additional context (e.g., sentences on chart paper, worksheets, as part of a game, or another text which uses the words).
  2. Children make and use puppets for an additional reading of the story.

#### Day 2

**Purpose:** To review core and key words; use the key word pig to spell and read new words.

**Materials:** *Silly Sally* core and key word cards; a set of index cards for the teacher and for each child; a rime card -ig and consonant cards b, d, f, j, p, tw, w; teacher-created sentences on strips of chart paper that include the words pig, oig, fig, jig, pig, twig, and wiggle.

**Instruction:**

- **Whole:** Read or act out the book *Silly Sally*.
- **Part:** 1. Review key and core words.
  2. Use the compare/contrast procedure:
    - (a) Concept of spelling pattern: Show children the word card pig. Underline the letters -ig. Introduce or review the concept of spelling pattern. Be sure that children know that the spelling pattern is the vowel and the letters that follow it. Provide other opportunities to identify the spelling pattern in other words (not -ig words).
    - (b) Making the rime-rhyme connection: Ask children to think of a word that rhymes with pig. Write that word under pig. Underline the -ig in the word or ask children if they notice anything about the spelling patterns in the two words. Say the words aloud, and note that often words that rhyme have the same spelling pattern.
    - (c) Word building: Tell children that knowing the spelling pattern of pig will help them spell many new words. With each child having an individual set of letter cards, children spell out words using the -ig pattern under the teacher’s direction. Teachers can be flexible about the process they use to get children to come up with other -ig words. We have found it helpful to provide hints for the words. "I’m thinking of a word that rhymes with pig. This is something a clown might wear on his head." Children manipulate the letter cards to spell out each new word and then copy each on a list or on index cards, which can be used for word sorting activities at a later date.
    - (d) Teacher modeling of compare/contrast: Tell children that knowing the spelling pattern for pig can also help them read new words. Model with a sample sentence on the chalkboard or sentence strip, providing a step-by-step process. For example, a think-aloud using the sentence *The wind blew so hard that the wig came off the man’s head might go something like this:

    (continued)
When teachers understand the framework and the rationale underlying the components of the approach, they can plan instruction flexibly. Decisions about the number of words taught, how many days are used for direct instruction, and grouping arrangements (e.g., whole class or small group; heterogeneous or homogeneous) should be based on students' needs. The metacognitive aspects of the ISA make it different from previous word family approaches and are important to develop students' use of the strategies when they read independently.

**Does the Integrated Strategies Approach work?**

In our own ongoing research (Leslie & Allen, 1996, 1997), we have found the ISA to be effective with primary-grade urban children, most of whom are considered at risk. The approach has been used with small groups and with whole classes. The ISA is the basis for an after-school tutoring project, where small groups are tutored by undergraduate teachers-in-training. The children are mostly second and third graders who read at a primer level or below when the tutoring begins each September. The data for the past 3 years indicate that the program has been consistently successful: 100% of the tutored children read well below grade level in the fall of each year, and at least 70% of the children could read grade-level materials by May.

The ISA has also been effective in regular classrooms. To assess the effectiveness of classroom implementation, individual, pre- and postassessments were conducted for all second and third graders in one of the urban schools using the approach. Eighty-three percent of the second graders and 90% of the third graders were able to read grade-level or higher materials at the end of the school year. In addition to the individual assessments, the third graders participated in a statewide reading assessment. The percentage of pupils exceeding the suggested standard increased from 74% in 1996 to 93% in 1997; this surpassed the 87% statewide average.

We have also been able to follow up graduates of the tutoring program, and our data offer hope for at-risk beginning readers. Unlike Juel (1988), who found little improvement for struggling first-grade readers as they moved into fourth grade, 80% of the children who were part of our tutoring project in the primary grades are now reading at grade level or above as intermediate-grade students. These children have clearly benefited from small-group tutoring and classroom implementation of the ISA.

Two components of the ISA have emerged as factors linked to growth in reading skill: strategy use and amount of recreational book reading. When children are asked, "What do you do when you come to a word you don't know?" those who report using the analogy approach together with cross-checking make the greatest gains. Also, data from individual reading histories consistently reveal that the children who make the most progress are also
those who read the most from materials sent home for recreational reading.

Our experience with the Integrated Strategies Approach provides evidence that teachers can help children avoid the negative aspects of the Matthew Effect. Systematic, explicit instruction provides children with multiple word identification strategies, which means that decoding and comprehending text are less challenging. In a recent survey, 74% of the children in an ISA program said that reading was “easy” or “very easy” for them. Only 3% said that reading was “very hard.” The children make use of skills and strategies as they read quality, motivating literature. Reading is seen as meaningful and pleasurable, and children are motivated to read on their own. When asked if they liked to read, 76% responded “a lot” and 66% reported that they read for fun at home “every day.” Perhaps the following comment from a principal summarizes the impact of the ISA:

The most dramatic thing I have seen is the amount of reading the kids do. Their appetite for learning and for reading has just grown remarkably. Obviously that love of reading comes from the fact that they are now more successful readers. They have learned strategies to help them read. They always come up to me and say, “Hey, I’m reading chapter books now” or “Can you come and listen to me read this book?” They’re really proud of themselves because they can read. They love it. It’s opened up whole new worlds to them.

At the present time, we are still debating how to help children acquire beginning reading skills, even though research reveals that there is no single best way to teach children to read (Adams, 1990). Allington and Cunningham (1996) argue that the classroom teacher’s role is central: “Classroom teachers are important, and effective classroom literacy instruction cannot be produced from a single master plan that all teachers are mandated to follow” (p. 65).

Teachers who understand that the key to a successful reading program includes effective instruction that affectively engages the students may find the Integrated Strategies Approach to be a useful framework as they develop classroom programs for beginning readers. Within the framework, teachers can make choices about instructional materials and supplemental instructional activities. Instruction is integrated into other aspects of the language arts curriculum and can be part of thematic units from other curriculum areas. Most important, the focus on strategy use and purposeful materials helps children become more independent and stay motivated to engage in real reading experiences.

Allen teaches courses in literacy education at Marquette University where she also codirects an early intervention project for urban children. She may be contacted at Marquette University, Schroeder Health Complex, PO Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881, USA.

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