

25 best Internet sources for teaching reading

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Recently, the status of reading instruction in the United States has been scrutinized as a result of raised awareness about poor reading outcomes (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2001; No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act of 2001, 2002; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). The federal government has placed foremost emphasis on early intervention and the use of scientifically based principles in the teaching of reading (NCLB, 2002). This emphasis has not been misplaced. We know that children identified early on as poor readers remain poor readers, but that targeted early intervention programs can greatly ameliorate these outcomes (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). Consequently, there has been a flurry of activity to identify characteristics of effective early intervention programs (Foorman & Torgesen; Lyon et al., 2001; National Reading Panel, 2001).

In April of 2000, the NRP concluded its investigation of research-based reading instruction. The panel had been given the assignment of reviewing research from the past 40 years that identified elements of effective reading programs. From this research, the Partnership for Reading (which combined efforts of the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the U.S. Department of Education) produced the booklet *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (NRP, 2001). The booklet presents five principles necessary for the teaching of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The report emphasized the effectiveness of systematic and explicit instruction throughout (NRP, 2001).

Technology has often been considered a panacea for many problems surrounding teaching

and learning: lack of motivation, teaching materials, and time on task, and a need for more skill practice (Hardman, Drew, & Egan, 2002; Smith & Meyers, 2003). Recently, attention has turned toward uses of the Internet in teaching (Essex, 2002; Smith & Meyers). Nearly every public school teacher now has access to the Internet somewhere in the workplace, but few integrate it into their instruction (Baines, Deluzain, & Hegngi, 1998). Smith and Meyers asserted that the Internet has the possibility to revolutionize teaching. Online tools for teachers include research-based instructional methods, classroom interventions, effective lesson plans, applications, and simulations (Smith & Meyers). Essex recommended integrating Internet-based activities into professional development for teachers as a way to promote the incorporation of these techniques into instruction.

This article attempts to bridge the barriers that exist in translating research to practice through presentation of teacher-identified websites. Teachers found these sites to be useful and applicable to daily practice, and they align directly with the NRP findings. Denton, Vaughn, and Fletcher (2003) identified several elements necessary to bring research-based practices to every student. These elements include “an effective and knowledgeable teacher, integration of key instructional components, differentiated instruction..., explicitness of instruction, and bridging the gap between research and practice” (p. 202).

Method

In the summer of 2005, 22 students enrolled in a graduate course of Research-Based Reading Instruction at a university in the Midwestern

United States. The majority of these students were practicing teachers. The students were assigned a project to locate websites that supported the NRP findings that they could use in their own classrooms. The students compiled a list of 252 websites in the five areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. They were asked to provide a description of the site and a rationale as to why each was selected.

I reviewed all proposed websites for content and applicability. The final list of sites was selected based on (1) alignment with NRP findings, (2) diversity of materials (e.g., lesson plans, assessments, activities, etc.), (3) possibility for practical classroom application, (4) comprehensiveness, in that the site provided a variety of activities, and (5) applicability to a variety of educational settings. The list of sites is divided into five sections, each corresponding with the five areas outlined in the report. Some sites contain activities in more than one of the areas.

Phonemic awareness

1. Phonemic awareness games and activities

Source: www.manatee.k12.fl.us/sites/elementary/palmasola/rcompindex1.htm

The NRP report emphasizes the importance of using activities to build phonemic awareness. This site includes games, activities, and worksheets designed to help students practice elements of phonemic awareness. Although some of the pages are geared toward parents, it is a starting point for identifying the kinds of activities that the NRP findings indicate are necessary to include in beginning phonemic awareness instruction.

2. Phonemic awareness activities

Source: www.readwritethink.org; click on “learning about language” and then scroll down the list to “phonemic awareness”

ReadWriteThink.org is a comprehensive site with links to a wide variety of activities for different grade levels. Its phonemic awareness activities cover all areas recommended by the NRP, although they are not organized sequentially. Each entry is a complete lesson plan, including the theory or research behind the lesson, and extension and reflection activities.

The site also has excellent activities for the other four areas outlined by the NRP.

3. Books that help teach phonemic awareness

Source: www.songsforteaching.com/avni/alliterativebooks.htm

The NRP recommends that children be taught to “notice, think about, and work with sounds in spoken language” (2001, p. 5). This page is a list of books that motivate children to think about sounds by using songs to address rhyme, alliteration, and other wordplay. Each listing is a short description of the book as well as the specific rhymes used. The page is part of a larger website that integrates songs into a variety of academic areas, including phonics.

4. Early literacy screening, tools, and activities

Source: www.getreadytoread.org

Get Ready to Read is an early literacy program from the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Its all-inclusive website contains a screener as well as skill-building activities, games, and literacy checklists. It includes several important components of phonemic awareness mentioned in the NRP booklet, such as rhyming and segmentation. More broadly, it addresses print knowledge, emergent writing, and “linguistic awareness,” one part of which is phonemic awareness. The program is ideal for tutoring situations and is easy to navigate.

5. Rhyming word activities

Source: <http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/k-1/activities/phonemic.html>

This site features easy-to-implement activities for several of the principles of phonemic awareness instruction found in the NRP booklet. The activities are organized into rhyming words, syllable segmentation, beginning sound substitution, sound isolation, and phonemic segmentation.

Phonics

1. Word and picture activities

Source: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/index.shtml

Although this website is intended to align with the BBC Schools TV series, it stands up well on its own. Its organization provides a systematic

phonics program, as described in the NRP booklet. This section of the site has online phonics games and other activities for young children. Some can be printed directly from the site, while others are online. The games are organized by word type, including CVC words, consonant clusters, and long-vowel sounds.

2. Phonics Skills Chart

Source: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/phonics/teach.htm>

The Phonics Skills Chart is a grade-level guide from preschool through sixth grade that outlines the progression of phonics competencies for the classroom. It is a simple visual tool for teachers to use in ensuring systematic phonics instruction, as recommended in the NRP booklet. The site also features sample lessons, worksheets, and activities for each competency.

3. The Nonsense Word Test

Source: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/phonics/nonsensewordtest.pdf>

The NRP booklet recommends that teachers develop individualized phonics programs for students. The Nonsense Word Test is a very quick and easy-to-use assessment that helps teachers determine students' strengths and weaknesses in phonics. The assessment is divided into sections such as short vowels and multisyllabic words.

4. Phonics assessment

Source: http://eprcontent.k12.com/placement/placement/placement_langarts_2.html

This site allows teachers to develop an individualized phonics program for students. The site provides additional assessment tools covering the various areas of phonics. The basic test assesses skills in areas such as letter naming, identifying sounds in words, and short-vowel knowledge. The more advanced phonics assessment includes long-vowel knowledge and reading words in sentences. The website includes directions for administration, a description of each test, and answer keys. It also features comprehension assessments for older readers.

5. Reading games rooms

Source: <http://www.adrianbruce.com/reading/games.htm>

This site offers a variety of activities that focus on the rules of phonics. It is a very simple tool to support teachers in supplementing a systematic and explicit program of phonics instruction, as outlined by the NRP. The site features online games as well as reproducibles such as word charts and posters for bulletin boards. A few games even allow teachers to customize words or sounds for more individualized instruction.

Fluency

1. Coaching reading fluency

Source: www.interdys.org/pdf/T38-Reading-Fluency.pdf#search=i_reading%20fluency

This website presents a basic model for coaching reading fluency and assessing students. The coaching model is supported by the NRP's finding that "repeated and monitored oral reading" (2001, p. 24) leads to improved fluency and to increased overall reading achievement. The model shows how to guide students through a lesson by using controlled passages and error analysis. It demonstrates how to plan and implement data-driven instruction. The model is supported by inclusion of reproducible charts and links to resources for controlled texts.

2. Readers Theatre

Sources: www.aaronshelp.com/rt/RTE.html

www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm

www.lisablau.com/freescripts.html

www.humboldt.edu/~jmf2/floss/rt-eval.html
(evaluation)

The NRP booklet mentions Readers Theatre as a motivating activity that encourages repeated reading to practice fluency. Readers Theatre has students work together to rehearse and perform a play. All of these sites feature downloadable scripts for children of various ages. The last site is a rubric that can be used to assess students' performance.

3. Peer tutor training manual

Source: www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/prtutor/prtutor_lesson3.pdf

The NRP booklet also recommends partner reading as a way to practice fluency and enhance motivation. This site presents very easy-to-follow

guidelines for training students to implement paired reading activities. It features a simple lesson plan (including preparation, materials needed, and assessments) and reproducible guide for recalling the steps involved in tutoring.

4. Teaching fluency through poetry

Source: www.poetry4kids.com/index.php

The NRP report recommends the use of choral, echo, and repeated reading in order to reinforce fluency. This website includes thousands of poems for all grade levels that can be used in implementing all three types of activities. Poems can be searched by topic or type (e.g., rhyming poems). The site includes opportunities for children to vote on poems, enter poetry contests, or play poetry games. It also features a rhyming dictionary to help children write their own poems.

5. Fluency calculator

Source: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/assessment/OFAcalc.htm>

The NRP recommends regular assessment of fluency. This oral fluency calculator is for use with grades 3 to 5. The user enters (1) the number of words read correctly per minute, and (2) the grade level of the child. The calculator will indicate if the child is reading above, at, or below grade level, and state if the child needs intervention. Below the calculator there are three assessments for oral reading fluency that can be administered in third, fourth, and fifth grade.

Vocabulary

1. Vocabulary instruction

Source: <http://www.vocabulary.com>

The NRP report encourages exposure to multiple types of vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary University is an immense website that supports all of these methods by including a wide variety of word lists, lesson plans, and recommended reading lists accompanied by chapter-by-chapter vocabulary words. It also features numerous vocabulary worksheets for grades 1 to 12. The worksheets are in a variety of formats, including crosswords, synonym and antonym sheets, and root-a-day puzzles.

2. Chapter books to read aloud

Source: www.kinderkorner.com/readalouds.html

Reading aloud to children is an indirect method to teaching vocabulary that is recommended by the NRP. This website provides an extensive list of books to read aloud at the various grade levels. It includes a short summary of each text and highlights inexpensive books. The end of the site is a compilation of other resources, mostly listings of recommended literature by theme (e.g., rainforests, bats, and spiders).

3. Vocabulary lesson plans

Source: http://lessonplancentral.com/lessons/Language_Arts/Vocabulary/index.htm

The NRP report advocates the use of direct instruction of vocabulary, which is broken down into “specific word instruction” and “word learning strategies.” This website provides diverse and creative methods that make these types of instruction accessible and engaging. For example, it allows for specific word instruction through wordplay and word challenges. It includes games such as “the dictionary game” to encourage students to use references. The site also features an index of vocabulary lesson plans for grades 1 to 5.

4. Vocabulary lists

Source: <http://www.tampareads.com/trial/vocabulary/index-vocab.htm>

This website is a compilation of downloadable lists of approximately 350 high-frequency words for grades 1 through 5. These lists are research based, and the authors claim that students who can read these words fluently at their grade level typically score in the top 10% on national standardized reading tests. These are the “useful words” (i.e., those words students will encounter repeatedly in their reading) recommended by the NRP for teaching students directly. The lists can be used as templates for instruction and include week-by-week guidelines.

5. Online vocabulary development

Source: <http://www.techteachers.com/vocabulary.htm>

This site features multiple links to unique and motivating activities to support vocabulary devel-

opment, including opportunities for both specific word instruction and word-learning strategies. It offers numerous online quizzes, puzzles, cartoons, and games, and includes an online thesaurus. Many of the activities can be used as assessments as well as skill builders.

Text comprehension

1. Children's Literature Web Guide

Source: www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown

Not only does this website provide lists of award-winning children's books, but it also contains suggestions for increasing reading comprehension and features unique ideas to help children enjoy reading. It supports the NRP findings that promote the use of questioning, summarizing, and making story structure explicit during reading. The site includes links to a comprehensive teacher resource page, online stories, guides to children's literature, and a searchable list of teaching ideas to accompany books.

2. Reading challenge

Source: www.bookadventure.org

Book Adventure is a free, motivating reading program that encourages independent reading at all levels and requires that students read for meaning. The NRP booklet indicates that good readers are both purposeful and active. This program gives students a purpose for reading and requires that they be active readers in order to participate in the program. Book Adventure guides students in a search of books tailored to their interests. They read books independently (not online) and take an online quiz. Students earn points for correct answers, and they can save points to exchange for various prizes, such as magazine subscriptions or temporary tattoos.

3. Literary lessons

Source: <http://home.att.net/~teaching/litlessons.htm>

The NRP booklet promotes teaching comprehension using a variety of strategies, including cooperative learning. This site covers programs such as Literature Circles, Literary Lunch Bunch Programs, Book Buddies, Rocket Reader Program, and Reading Workshops. Each strategy includes an

explanation and guidelines, related links, and reproducible.

4. Reading strategies

Source: <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/links.html>

This website is a comprehensive collection of links to a wide assortment of all of the reading strategies advocated by the NRP. Strategies include multiple approaches to note-taking, using graphic organizers, summarizing, and many more. There are opportunities for both individual and group learning. Many of the links provide reproducible to help teachers in guiding students through their reading.

5. Comprehension rubric

Source: www.mrsmcgowan.com/reading/rubrics.htm#Comprehension

This website presents an easy-to-understand and easy-to-use rubric produced by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The rubric assesses students' comprehension based on an oral or written retelling and can be used at any grade level. It can be used as an assessment to support teaching of the strategies outlined in the NRP booklet.

Bridging research and practice

This article attempts to bridge the research-to-practice gap in research-based reading instruction in several ways. First, it raises awareness of the findings of the NRP. Second, it encourages use of the findings through presentation of practical Web-based lessons and activities. Third, the sites outlined promote the full range of reading practices mentioned in the NRP report, such as systematic and explicit teaching, embedded instruction, strategy instruction, and repeated reading (NRP, 2001). Finally, the article encourages integration of multiple modes of instruction into teachers' reading programs through its presentation of diverse materials, strategies, and activities.

The efforts of the NRP and others will not have an effect on children's reading unless those findings are disseminated along with practical ideas for implementation. This article presents teachers with many activities, assessments, and lesson plans to

aid in accomplishing this goal. Teachers are the key to implementing any educational reform (Cuban, 1993), and these websites are resources to provide practical, accessible, and research-based tools to help realize the vision of the NRP.

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