

## Program Description and Annotated Bibliography of Best Research-Based Practices for *Steps to Advance*

The following program description of *Steps to Advance* is included in this document because of the newness of this program. While a relatively short description can never do any program justice, it can serve to hit the high points and answer some of the preliminary questions about the program. This description, along with the annotated bibliography of best research-based practices used in the development of *Steps to Advance*, serves as the initial research-based information for this program.

### *Steps to Advance* Program Description

*Steps to Advance* is an intervention solution that can be used in the classroom with striving readers who struggle with reading and comprehending grade-level material. The goal of *Steps to Advance* is to provide students with experiences that encourage confidence, develop strong reading habits, and integrate informational and literary reading goals outlined in standards. *Steps to Advance* is designed to work with or without *Benchmark Advance*. Instructionally, the texts, unit topics, and scope and sequence are aligned for easy integration between the two programs.

To help students practice and acquire the essential vocabulary and reading comprehension skills needed to succeed, each *Steps to Advance* unit provides three weeks of highly scaffolded and visually supported reading instruction. The gradual steps within each unit advance student to access complex text. The gradual steps include the following.

- The units begin with an essential question, overview video, and visuals to spark collaborative conversations.
- Content vocabulary is presented on the *Talk About It* pages where students are exposed to the concepts and vocabulary needed to begin to make meaning of the texts they will encounter in the unit.
- The *Bridge Text* is a below level text with visual support and integrated vocabulary, enhancing the meaning of the text.
- The *Amplified Text* is a step up for students. This is a more complex, scaffolded version of the grade-level text that comes next.
- At the end of the week, students are reading the *Core Text*, either independently or with support from the teacher.
- Interactive vocabulary, word work, and comprehension activities using graphic organizers support each mini lesson throughout the week, promoting meaning-making of the texts.

To support the implementation of *Steps to Advance*, the following items are included.

- *Teacher's Guides* provide full lesson plans, integrated ELD support, and support for positive student behaviors.
- *Assessments* are included with *Steps to Advance* to monitor student progress, inform instructional next steps, and mirror the new assessment formats students will encounter.

- A *Program Guide* provides information about implementation of the program along with suggested behavioral and instructional routines and home connection activities.

*Steps to Advance* was designed to be a clear, flexible, easy-to-use resource to help students who struggle to read. The program aims to help teachers integrate the informational and literary reading goals outlined in the standards with students' own personal learning goals using high-quality, research-based resources and instructional procedures.

## Annotated Bibliography of Best Practices

The following research-based best practices were instructional in the creation of the new program *Steps to Advance*. This report does not contain an exhaustive list of resources supporting these best practices but serves to provide a sampling of the research that supports these best practices.

*Steps to Advance* is a new program that have not yet been in the field long enough to allow for the gathering of results. Benchmark Education Company is currently in the process of determining the location(s) for studies that will show the efficacy of this program. In terms of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence, this program would be considered, at this time, at the demonstrating a rationale evidence level.

### Guided Practice Approach (Scaffolding/Modeling by Teacher)

Burkins, J., & Yaris, K. (2016). *Who's doing the work? How to say less so readers can do more*. Portland ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

*Description:* Following up on *Reading Wellness*, Jan Burkins and Kim Yaris explore how some traditional scaffolding practices may actually rob students of important learning opportunities and independence. *Who's Doing the Work?* suggests ways to make small but powerful adjustments to instruction that hold students accountable for their own learning.

Educators everywhere are concerned about students whose reading development inexplicably plateaus, as well as those who face challenging texts without applying the strategies they've been taught. When such problems arise, our instinct is to do more. But when we summarize text before reading or guide students when they encounter difficult words, are we leading them to depend on our support? If we want students to use strategies independently, Jan and Kim believe that we must question the ways our scaffolding is getting in the way.

Next generation reading instruction is responsive to students' needs, and it develops readers who can integrate reading strategies without prompting from instructors. In *Who's Doing The Work?*, Jan and Kim examine how instructional mainstays such as read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading look in classrooms where students do more of the work. Classroom snapshots at the end of each chapter help translate the ideas in the book into practice.

*Who's Doing the Work?* offers a vision for adjusting reading instruction to better align with the goal of creating independent, proficient, and joyful readers.

Duke, N. K., Cervetti, G. N., & Wise, C. N. (2017). Learning from exemplary teachers of literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(4), 395-400.

*Abstract:* Recent articles in *The Reading Teacher* have communicated contributions of reading research over the last three decades. In this article, the authors focus on a type of research that has contributed to our understanding of practice: studies of exemplary teachers of literacy. The authors discuss three studies and their findings: a study of a teacher who was exemplary in fostering the literacy achievement of African American students; a study of two teachers who were, in comparison with five other teachers studied, exemplary in fostering literacy engagement; and a study of 36 teachers who were more and less effective at fostering literacy growth. These and other studies of exemplary teachers reveal a wide range of instructional practices and their orchestration.

### Small-Group Instruction

Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Clark, K., & Walpole, S. (2000). Effective schools and accomplished teachers: Lessons about primary-grade reading instruction in low-income schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101(2), 121-165.

*Abstract:* We investigated school and classroom factors related to primary-grade reading achievement in schools with moderate to high numbers of students on subsidized lunch. 14 schools across the United States and 2 teachers in each of grades K-3 participated. 2 low and 2 average readers per class were tested individually in the fall and spring on measures of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The teachers were observed 5 times by trained observers between December and April during an hour of reading instruction, completed a written survey, completed a weekly log of reading/language arts activities in February and again in April, and were interviewed in May. Each school was identified as most, moderately, or least effective based on several measures of reading achievement in the primary grades. A combination of school and teacher factors, many of which were intertwined, was found to be important in the most effective schools. Statistically significant school factors included strong links to parents, systematic assessment of pupil progress, and strong building communication and collaboration. A collaborative model for the delivery of reading instruction, including early reading interventions, was a hallmark of the most effective schools. Statistically significant teacher factors included time spent in small-group instruction, time spent in independent reading, high levels of student on-task behavior, and strong home communication. More of the most accomplished teachers and teachers in the most effective schools supplemented explicit phonics instruction with coaching in which they taught students strategies for applying phonics to their everyday reading. Additionally, more of the most accomplished teachers and teachers in the most effective schools employed higher-level questions in discussions of text, and the most accomplished teachers were more likely to ask students to write in response to reading. In all of the most effective schools, reading was clearly a priority at both the school and classroom levels.

Wyatt, T., & Chapman-DeSousa, B. (2017). Teaching as interaction: Challenges in transitioning teachers' instruction to small groups. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45, 61-70.

*Abstract:* Although small group instruction is often endorsed in teaching young children, teachers are rarely given explicit instruction on how to move instruction into small groups where effective adult-child interactions can take place. This study examines how 14 early childhood educators transitioned their instruction from whole to small group teaching after participating in a year-long program of professional development. The results indicate teachers' previous definitions of "teaching as dissemination" interfered with their ability to take on new roles, design tasks, and manage time. Implications include the need for teacher educators to focus on how teaching through interaction shifts these aspects of the teaching process.

## Gradual Release

Gregg, C. M. (2016). *Teachers walking the talk: Four teachers' perceptions and instruction of reading minilessons* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10163593)

*Abstract:* This study is about teachers' reading minilesson instruction. Research questions sought information about teachers' perceptions of their minilessons, what content was taught, and what instruction was like. Describing teachers' minilesson instruction is of interest because this type of lesson is well-described in the reading education literature but relatively little is known about what occurs in classroom settings.

In this study teachers' explicit instruction of reading content is viewed through the lens of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model of instruction. In particular, the "Teacher Does" Phase of GRR model was of interest because it aligns with the explicit instructional aspects of reading minilessons. Four white, female elementary teachers from a single school in a small Midwestern town served as participants. All participants were experienced with teaching reading minilessons. Data collected for this study came from three principal sources: transcriptions of 36 video recordings of participants as they taught reading minilessons, interviews with participants and curriculum documents.

Two themes emerged from the data analysis. Derived from interview data, Theme 1 indicated teachers' perceptions of their instruction were closely aligned with literature about minilessons: teacher as competent other, explicit instruction through demonstration and explanation, and brief guided practice. Theme 2, derived from observation data, showed that participants' explicit instruction during minilessons was limited. Additionally, minilesson content was focused on thinking within the text.

Findings lead to asserting that in order to teach readers to learn to "have a conversation with text," the minilesson content must challenge students to think in a variety of ways, not only within text. It was also asserted that some teaching moves result in teachers taking more responsibility for performing the reading task than others. Modeling, explaining, thinking aloud for example, result in teachers taking responsibility for making invisible reading processes visible. By contrast, when question and answer methods dominate the minilesson, teachers tend not to engage in explicit instruction of reading content, and Phase 2 of GRR model, "We do it together," dominates the lesson. In this case study, teachers may have sacrificed what they

knew about modeling and explaining due to the way the commercial program structured the minilesson.

Hart, J., & Stebick, D. (2016). Making the invisible visible: Rtl and reading comprehension. *The NERA Journal*, 51(2), 43-56.

*Abstract:* For the better part of a century the educational community has had increased focus on the importance of reading. The publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It* (Flesch, 1955) began the surge of effort to better understand the cognitive process of reading to further examine how educators can help children become better readers. Since this 1950's publication, reading research grew and philosophies developed and subsequently changed. However, one thing remained the same: understanding what we read is critically important to becoming a critical thinker. Thus, reading comprehension research continued to boom and the educational community continues to seek ways in which reading comprehension instruction can be improved.

Read, S., Landon-Hays, M., & Martin-Rivas, A. (2014). Gradually releasing responsibility to students writing persuasive text. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(6), 469-477.

*Abstract:* The emphasis on improving writing instruction, especially the writing of non-narrative texts, may lead some teachers to seek effective ways to teach students. The IMSCI model, a scaffolded model for writing instruction, is useful for planning effective instruction. This article describes a research project conducted in a 4th grade classroom emphasizing the combined benefits of scaffolded instruction and genre study and testing scaffolded persuasive writing lessons based on the IMSCI model. Researchers wrote lesson plans using the IMSCI model as the underlying structure and tied the lessons to science objectives for fourth grade. Teachers implemented the lessons in their classrooms and student essays were collected as data. Results from this study suggest there are positive outcomes in student writing as a result of a focus on genre in a scaffolded instructional setting.

Tracey, D. H., & Morrow, L. M. (2017). *Lenses on reading: An Introduction to theories and models* (Third Edition). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

*Description:* Widely adopted as an ideal introduction to the major models of reading, this text guides students to understand and facilitate children's literacy development. Coverage encompasses the full range of theories that have informed reading instruction and research, from classical thinking to cutting-edge cognitive, social learning, physiological, and affective perspectives. Readers learn how theory shapes instructional decision making and how to critically evaluate the assumptions and beliefs that underlie their own teaching. Pedagogical features include framing and discussion questions, learning activities, teacher anecdotes, classroom applications, and examples of research studies grounded in each approach.

Young, M. I. (2017). *The effects of teaching reading using the gradual release of responsibility model and 4th grade reading* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10617201)

*Abstract:* Students' inability to meet grade level standards in reading on state and national assessments continues to be a problem across the nation. This causal comparative cohort model sought to examine the effect of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (GRRM) on 4th grade reading achievement, gender, and socio-economic status, and to examine educators' perceptions about the effectiveness of the GRRM on reading. The sample population consisted of approximately 400 third and fourth grade students, 12 teachers, 6 coaches, and 7 administrators in five Title I schools in southeast Tennessee. Statistical significance was found between the control and treatment groups. Conclusions reflect that the GRRM was effective. Significant differences were not found according to gender nor socio-economic status.

### Learning-Related Skills/Self-Regulated Learning (Productive Struggle, Perseverance, Flexible Thinking)

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). Scaffolded reading instruction of content-area texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(5), 347-351.

*Abstract:* In this column, we focus on increasing text complexity during scaffolded, small group instruction. We begin with a discussion about the need to adjust expectations for leveled texts for older readers and then focus on the ways in which teachers can accomplish this.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2015). Selecting texts and tasks for content-area reading and learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 524-529.

*Abstract:* For students to learn science, social studies, and technical subjects, their teachers have to engage them in meaningful lessons. As part of those lessons, students read informational texts. The selection of those texts is critical. Teachers can select texts worthy of attention and then align instruction and the post-reading tasks such that students learn at higher levels.

Matthews, J. S., Kizzie, K. T., Rowley, S. J., & Cortina, K. (2010). African Americans and boys: Understand the literacy gap, tracing academic trajectories, and evaluating the role of learning-related skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 757-771.

*Abstract:* In this study, the authors examined the racial and gender gap in the academic development of African American and White children from kindergarten to 5th grade. Their main goal was to determine the extent to which social and behavioral factors, including learning-related skills, problem behaviors, and interpersonal skills, explain these gaps and shed light on the academic difficulties specifically experienced by African American boys. The authors utilized the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study– Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) sample and applied growth curve modeling. Learning-related skills explained the literacy development of African American boys over and above the effects of problem behaviors, socioeconomic status, and home literacy environment. Results suggest that emphasis placed on the behavior problems and the social risk factors associated with African American boys needs to be refocused and should be accompanied by increased efforts to improve learning-related skills in the classroom context and beyond.

## Importance of Vocabulary

August, D., Carlo, M., Dressler, C., & Snow, C. (2005). The critical role of vocabulary development for English language learners. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 20*(1), 50-57.

*Abstract:* English language learners (ELLs) who experience slow vocabulary development are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English-only peers. Such students are likely to perform poorly on assessments in these areas and are at risk of being diagnosed as learning disabled. In this article, we review the research on methods to develop the vocabulary knowledge of ELLs and present lessons learned from the research concerning effective instructional practices for ELLs. The review suggests that several strategies are especially valuable for ELLs, including taking advantage of students' first language if the language shares cognates with English; ensuring that ELLs know the meaning of basic words, and providing sufficient review and reinforcement. Finally, we discuss challenges in designing effective vocabulary instruction for ELLs. Important issues are determining which words to teach, taking into account the large deficits in second-language vocabulary of ELLs, and working with the limited time that is typically available for direct instruction in vocabulary.

Bailey, A., & Huang, B. (2011). Do current English language development/proficiency standards reflect the English needed for success in school? *Language Testing, 28*(3), 343-365.

*Abstract:* English language development or proficiency (ELD/P) standards promise to play an important role in the instruction and assessment of the language development of English language learner (ELL) pre-K-12 students, but to do so effectively they must convey the progression of student language learning in authentic school contexts for authentic academic purposes. The construct of academic English is defined as the vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse associated with language used to teach academic content as well as the language used to navigate the school setting more generally. The construct definition is informed by a relatively modest number of empirical studies of textbooks, content assessments, and observations of classroom discourse. The standards of a state with a large ELL population and a large multi-state consortium are then reviewed to illustrate the role of the academic English construct in the standards' coverage of language modalities or domains, levels of attainment or proficiency, grade spans, and the needs of the large number of young English learners. Recommendations and potential strategies for validating, creating, and augmenting standards that reflect authentic uses of academic language in school settings are also made.

Nagy, W. E., & Townsend, D. (2012). Words as tools: Learning academic vocabulary as language acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly, 47*(1), 91-108.

*Abstract:* There is a growing awareness of the importance of academic vocabulary, and more generally, of academic language proficiency, for students' success in school. There is also a growing body of research on the nature of the demands that academic language places on readers and writers, and on interventions to help students meet these demands. In this review, we discuss the role of academic vocabulary within academic language, examine recent research on instruction in academic vocabulary, considering both general academic words and discipline-specific words, and offer our perspective on the current state of this research and

recommendations on how to continue inquiry and to improve practice in this area. We use the metaphor of ‘words as tools’ to reflect our understanding that instruction in academic vocabulary must approach words as means for communicating and thinking about disciplinary content, and must therefore provide students with opportunities to use the instructed words for these purposes as they are learning them.

Snow, C. E., & Uccelli, P. (2009). The challenge of academic language. In D. Olson & N. Torrance (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of literacy* (pp. 112-133). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wong Fillmore, L., & Fillmore, C. J. (2012). What does text complexity mean for English Learners and language minority students? *Commissioned Papers on Language and Literacy Issues in the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards*.

### Collaborative Conversations

Colombo, M., & Fontaine, P. (2009). Building vocabulary and fostering comprehension strategies for English language learners: The power of academic conversations in social studies. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 45(1), 46-54.

*Abstract:* Given the large number of academic words that ELLs must learn in a short period of time, vocabulary presents a special challenge (Nation, 2001; Stahl Sc Nagy, 2006). Because learning a word requires approximately 12 intermittent retrievals (Stahl Sc Nagy, 2006), vocabulary development is likely to be facilitated when students attend to the word within text, access the word using tools such as vocabulary cards, and then hear and use the word in meaningful conversations, journal entries, and authentic correspondence (Nation, 2001).

Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Portsmouth, NH: Stenhouse Publishers.

*Description:* Where would we be without conversation? Throughout history, conversations have allowed us to see different perspectives, build ideas, and solve problems. Conversations, particularly those referred to in this book as academic conversations, push students to think and learn in lasting ways. Academic conversations are back-and-forth dialogues in which students focus on a topic and explore it by building, challenging, and negotiating relevant ideas.

Unfortunately, academic conversations are rare in many classrooms. Talk is often dominated by the teacher and a few students, or it does not advance beyond short responses to the teacher's questions. Even certain teaching approaches and curriculum programs neglect to train students how to maintain a focused, respectful, and thoughtful conversation.

To address these challenges, authors Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford have identified five core communication skills to help students hold productive academic conversations across content areas. These skills include elaborating and clarifying, supporting ideas with evidence, building on and/or challenging ideas, paraphrasing, and synthesizing. This book shows teachers how to weave the cultivation of academic conversation skills and conversations into current teaching approaches. More specifically, it describes how to use conversations to build the following:

- Academic vocabulary and grammar

- Critical thinking skills such as persuasion, interpretation, consideration of multiple perspectives, evaluation, and application
- Literacy skills such as questioning, predicting, connecting to prior knowledge, and summarizing
- Complex and abstract essential understandings in content areas such as adaptation, human nature, bias, conservation of mass, energy, gravity, irony, democracy, greed, and more
- An academic classroom environment brimming with respect for others' ideas, equity of voice, engagement, and mutual support

The ideas in this book stem from many hours of classroom practice, research, and video analysis across grade levels and content areas. Readers will find numerous practical activities for working on each conversation skill, crafting conversation-worthy tasks, and using conversations to teach and assess. *Academic Conversations* offers an in-depth approach to helping students develop into the future parents, teachers, and leaders who will collaborate to build a better world.

Zwiers, J., O'Hara, S., & Pritchard, R. (2014). *Common Core standards in diverse classrooms: Essential practices for developing academic language and disciplinary literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Stenhouse Publishers.

*Description:* The Common Core State Standards require students to do more with knowledge and language than ever before. Rather than be mere consumers of knowledge, students must now become creators, critics, and communicators of ideas across disciplines. Yet in order to take on these new and exciting roles, many students need daily teaching with an extra emphasis on accelerating their academic communication skills.

*Common Core Standards in Diverse Classrooms* describes seven research-based teaching practices for developing complex language and literacy skills across grade levels and disciplines: using complex texts, fortifying complex output, fostering academic interaction, clarifying complex language, modeling, guiding, and designing instruction. Most important, you will find clear descriptions and examples of how these essential practices can—and should—be woven together in real lessons. You will also find the following:

- Classroom activities based on the practices
- Dozens of classroom examples from lessons in different grade levels and disciplines
- Detailed lessons with annotations focused on language and literacy development
- Strategies and tools for building system-wide capacity for sustained growth in the practices

*Common Core Standards in Diverse Classrooms* is a concise guide for helping us improve our practices to strengthen two vital pillars that support student learning: academic language and disciplinary literacy.

Zwiers, J., & Soto, I. (2017). *Academic language mastery: Conversational discourse in context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

*Description:* By now it's a given: if we're to help our ELLs and SELs access the rigorous demands of today's content standards, we must cultivate the "code" that drives school success: academic language. Look no further for assistance than this much-anticipated series from Ivannia Soto, in which she invites field authorities Jeff Zwiers, David and Yvonne Freeman, Margarita Calderon, and Noma LeMoine to share *every* teacher's need-to-know strategies on the four essential components of academic language.

The subject of this volume is conversational discourse. Here, Jeff Zwiers reveals the power of academic conversation in helping students develop language, clarify concepts, comprehend complex texts, and fortify thinking and relational skills. With this book as your roadmap, you'll learn how to:

- Foster the skills and language students must develop for productive interactions
- Implement strategies for scaffolding paired conversations
- Assess student's oral language development as you go

It's imperative that our ELLs and SELs practice academic language in rich conversations with others in school, especially when our classrooms may be their only opportunities to receive modeling, scaffolding, and feedback focused on effective discourse. This book, in concert with the other three volumes in the series, can provide both a foundation and a framework for accelerating the learning of diverse students across grade levels and disciplines.