What are Accurate Descriptions of Independent, Instructional, and Frustrational Reading Levels for Individual Students?

"Fluency develops as a result of many opportunities to practice reading with a high degree of success. Therefore, your students should practice orally rereading text that is reasonably easy for them" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 27). Students can encounter three types of text (Katz, Polkoff, & Gurvitz, 2005; Osborn, Lehr, & Hiebert, 2003):

- Independent level text (relatively easy for the reader, with no more than approximately 1 in 20 words difficult for the reader; 95% success or higher; with 90% comprehension).

- Instructional level text (challenging but manageable text for the reader, with no more than approximately 1 in 10 words difficult for the reader; 90% to 94% success; with 75% comprehension).

- Frustrational level text (problematic text for the reader, with more than 1 in 10 words difficult for the reader; less than 90% success; with 50% comprehension).

Most researchers advocate the use of text containing words students know or can decode easily (e.g., Allington, 2002; Armbruster et al., 2003; Hasbrouck, 2006). You can determine if a story or text is appropriate for students to read independently using the following steps:

1. Select a 100–200 word passage from a book that the student has not read previously.

2. Have the student read the passage aloud. Make sure you start at the beginning of a paragraph and avoid lots of dialogue. Count substitutions, mispronunciations, omissions, reversals, and hesitations for more than 3 seconds as errors; insertions, self corrects, and repetitions do not count as errors.

3. Subtract the number of errors the student made from the total number of words—this will yield the number of correct words read by the student; divide the number of correct words read by the total number of words in the passage and multiply by 100.

Example: passage length = 200 words; student makes 12 errors or reads 188 correct words; divide 188 correct words by 200 total words equaling .94; multiply .94 by 100 to get 94%.

4. Compare the student's calculated accuracy level to the reading level percentages (i.e., 95% or higher = independent level; 90%–94% = instructional; below 90% = frustrational); in the above example, the student would be at an instructional reading level (94% falls in the 90% to 94% range).

5. Develop 5–8 comprehension questions (at least one "who, what, where, why, and inference–type" question). Ask these comprehension questions after the student reads the passage.

6. Record each correctly answered question. Subtract the number of questions answered incorrectly from the total number of questions; divide the number of correctly answered questions by the total number of questions and multiply by 100.

Example: number of questions = 6; student answers 1 incorrectly or answers 5 questions correctly; divide 5 correctly answered questions by 6 total questions equaling .83; multiply .83 by 100 to get 83%.

Corrective Reading

7 Compare the student's calculated percentage correct to the comprehension levels (i.e., 90% = independent; 75% = instructional; 50% = frustrational); in the above example, the student would be at an instructional level (83% is above 75% and less than 90%).

How Can You Tell if Students are Working at the Appropriate Instructional Level in the *Corrective Reading Decoding* Program?

The **Corrective Reading Decoding** program is designed with student success in mind.

- Only a small amount of new learning (10%–15% of the total lesson) occurs in each lesson.

- New concepts and skills are presented in two or three consecutive lessons to provide students with enough exposure to new material to use it in other applications.

- The majority of each lesson firms and reviews material and skills presented earlier in the program.

The small-step design of the program promises successful learning for students who are placed appropriately. Four criteria help you determine if students are working at the appropriate instructional level during lessons (Engelmann,1999).

1 Each time a task presented, the group either responds correctly (all students respond correctly and in unison) or incorrectly (some students give the wrong response, no response, or do not respond in unison). Students should be at least 70% correct on information that is being introduced for the first time. If students are much below 70%, they will find it difficult to learn the skills being presented. If they are only at 50%, they are at chance levels and are probably guessing.

2 Students should be at least 90% correct on parts of the lesson that deal with skills and information taught earlier in the program (assuming previous skill mastery). For example, when students read a passage, they should read at least 90% of the words correctly on the first reading because virtually all of the words should be familiar. If students are consistently below the 90% correct level, the amount of new learning is too great.

3 At the end of a lesson, all students should be "virtually 100% firm on all tasks and activities" (p. 6). For example, on the second reading of the passage, students should read with close to 100% accuracy.

4 Students should be at least 85% correct on independent work.

To determine student-reading level, you should complete the reading checkout and words correct per minute (WCPM) calculation as scripted. **Corrective Reading** Checkout Charts provide lesson numbers; number of words per checkout or reading checkout goals; error thresholds; minimum correct words per minute; and independent, instructional, and frustrational reading levels including words correct per minute. The chart for Level A is on page 32.