

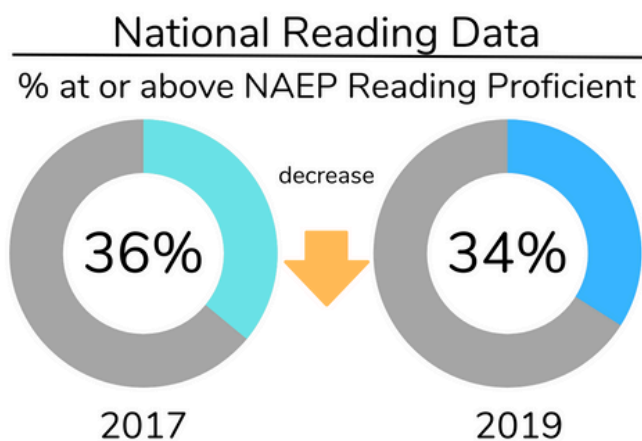


Reading Scores Have Stalled and Lowest-Achieving Students Continue to Struggle

It's Time for a Different Reading Solution–It's Time for Skill-Based Instruction

Reading is personal, it's technical, and it doesn't get enough attention in secondary education. To be clear, reading tasks are assigned in secondary classrooms across the curriculum, but students rarely get time to practice transferable reading skills online or in class that will help them read complex texts successfully. Students might be asked to read a few articles in order to build a poster, or they are told to highlight what they think is important in a text without any modeling. The problem is reading is assigned but not explicitly taught. Students must learn high-level reading skills like marking textual details, analyzing text structure, and evaluating an author's argument to name a few that cut across all subjects and disciplines. Students who master these interdisciplinary skills will perform well in various reading and writing situations. Depending on the discipline, students may read differently, or write for different purposes and to different audiences, but they will need a common set of reading skills that they can strategically employ in any discipline.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), average reading scores have remained the same since 1992. More concerning is that 8th grade students on average are reading below proficiency since 1992¹ and 12th grade students have steadily dropped since 1992. What's worse, our most vulnerable students have dropped more than any other group.²



¹ The Nation's Report Card. (n.d.). NAEP Reading: National Average Scores. The Nation's Report Card. Retrieved November 10, 2022, from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/scores/?grade=8>

² The Nation's Report Card. (n.d.). NAEP Reading: National Average Scores. The Nation's Report Card. Retrieved November 10, 2022, from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/scores/?grade=12>





Currently, only 34% of secondary students in the United States are reading at or above proficient. When we factor in the learning loss that happened between 2020-2021, it becomes clear that more time and resources must be spent on explicitly teaching reading.

Let's examine how reading gaps start. At the third grade, instruction shifts from learning to read to reading to learn. This means, as students progress through the elementary years and into secondary education, students experience greater responsibility for making meaning from the texts they read. And with each grade level, text and task complexity increases. Instruction shifts to content and away from skills which means less time is spent in class explicitly teaching reading. As a result, gaps form and widen as students move from one grade level to the next. When students struggle to access reading, they fall behind, develop fewer vocabulary words, and lose confidence in themselves as readers. By the time students reach middle school, reading gaps can be so severe that students begin to check out of school. Students become less confident, less motivated, and less interested in achieving academic success.

One problem is teacher training. Across the board, teachers are not trained on how to explicitly teach reading comprehension skills. They are content experts not reading teachers. At least, this is the perception. Alternatively, we believe all teachers are reading teachers. Unfortunately, there are many realities like time, pacing guides, literacy training, etc. that teachers must contend with before shifting to a skill-based instruction pedagogy.

Another challenge is identifying a *good* online reading program. Many schools rely on online reading practice to assess their students' reading comprehension and to teach their low performing and most vulnerable populations how to read well. Unfortunately, reading practice that asks students to answer multiple choice questions will not teach transferable skills students need to succeed as readers. Online instruction can teach students how to read more closely and more successfully, but the reading program must model or emulate classroom instruction where students practice a reading process, reread with purpose, and have opportunities to strategically select reading skills to help them comprehend what a text says and does. In other words,





if students are spending time reading online, they should learn comprehension reading skills that transfer to their academic classes. Teachers should also be given access to a reading curriculum that they can use to support and extend what students are learning online.

It is the purpose of this report, therefore, to illuminate what is possible when it comes to reading instruction at the secondary level and show the difference between assigning reading and teaching reading. To accomplish this, we will use Jeff Zwiers' work on pseudo-communication as a lens to analyze the reading experience in secondary education in order to better understand why students are not growing as readers even though they are assigned a significant amount of reading.

Jeff Zwiers, in his book *The Communication Effect*, argues that students are accustomed to engaging in what he refers to as pseudo-communication. Zwiers defines pseudo-communication as doing something *unmeaningful* with language. That is, students “speak” in class to gain points for better grades, quickly check-off tasks, or perform to elicit praise from their teachers. These purposes for speaking

produce inauthentic conversations. Student communication does not produce new learning, language development, and higher-level thinking skills. Zwiers argues that some of this behavior is learned from years of a “factorylike framework” where students do what they are told and follow rigid checklists when speaking and writing. In this model, Zwiers contends, students are “busy and controlled” and are simply “playing the game of school.”

We see a parallel between Zwiers' work on pseudo-communication and how middle and high school students approach reading assignments in their classes. When students are assigned reading in secondary classrooms, are students looking for answers or are they actively engaged in close reading?

Pseudo-active Reading

Pseudo-active reading happens when students read to accomplish a given task without any real purpose or strategic use of reading skills. Similar to Zwiers' notion of pseudo-communication, pseudo-active reading has purposes like completing tasks, reading within a specific amount of time, answering questions, and reading to know something for a test. These types of



purposes do not promote “active” (or close) reading, nor do they create opportunities for students to think critically and practice essential literacy skills.

Too often, reading is seen as a means to an end in secondary course work. Students become “hunters” and “gatherers” of correct answers, paying little attention to writers’ linguistic moves, their purposes, and structural patterns. The simple goal of reading becomes completion, memorization, and point accumulation.

What is the solution? Students must be taught specific reading comprehension skills that they can strategically use on their own. The types of questions good readers ask while reading must be explicitly taught through the modeling and practice of active reading. Reading becomes authentic as students are given the opportunity to analyze the meaning of a text, identify and discuss language functions, and evaluate evidence and the overall effectiveness of a writer’s style and structure.

Active, Authentic Reading

Active, authentic reading begins with a

clear purpose that drives engagement and critical thinking. In the beginning, purposes are given to students to help them form habits of mind so that they can be independent readers capable of transferring reading skills to various reading tasks and academic environments. This type of purpose-driven reading is modeled and rehearsed. Eventually, students become independent readers who can strategically implement reading skills and ask questions of a text while reading. Consider the following questions active readers ask.

Table 1: Questions Active Readers Ask

- What type of text is this? What can I predict about the structure, language, and content?
- What is the central idea/claim? How do I know?
- How does the writer support the central idea/claim?
- How does the writer structure/organize the information in the text?
- What is the writer’s point of view? How does the writer feel about the subject?
- How does the writer guide me through the evidence?
- What words and phrases are essential to the writer’s central claim or idea?



As students learn to read and reread with purpose, they begin digging deeper into a text, asking different types of questions with each reread. Active reading, then, requires higher level thinking like analyzing, interpreting, connecting, visualizing, and evaluating. And it requires soft skills like patience, attentiveness, curiosity, and tenacity.

What's more, retention of new information increases when students think deeply about what they are reading. If we want students to remember what they have read, we must give students the opportunity to interact with text in more meaningful ways. When students are engaged in pseudo-active reading, they struggle to remember the information because their purpose is to "find something" for credit instead of digging deeper to gain greater understanding.

An Argument for Skills

To close the reading gap, teachers must adopt a skills-based approach to teaching reading. We know that teachers already do so much, so Quindew was created by classroom teachers to support reading instruction in the classroom. With our technology, we can increase opportunities

for students to practice authentic, deep reading skills that they need to narrow and eventually close learning gaps.

Throughout secondary education, courses are designed around content--that is, classes are developed based on the information we want students to know. What our students learn in U.S. History, for example, is quite different from what they learn in a life science class. The content is different. Each class has its own set of facts, vocabulary, and concepts that students must learn in a short period of time. But what skills are students learning in these classes? They are expected to know a wealth of information, but what are they able to do as a result of taking the class? Skill-based instruction moves students toward independence as they learn how to make meaning on their own through purposeful literacy skill development.

Skill-based instruction is about planning, implementing, and assessing literacy skills. In a skill-based classroom, a good amount of instructional time is dedicated to practicing, assessing, and reflecting on skills. As students practice skills, they are



reading informational and argument texts, discussing ideas, and summarizing essential information. They are learning how to think critically, analyze ideas, and speak and write about texts in sophisticated ways. The focus in the classroom is on developing students' into independent readers and thinkers so that they are prepared for the rigors of college and careers. Content knowledge is critical, and using reading, writing, and speaking skills to access that knowledge helps students learn it and retain it.

An Educator's role in skill-based instruction is simple: set high expectations, facilitate skill practice, and support all students so they can be successful. In essence, teachers become more like coaches leading a team. They introduce a skill, model it, and ask students to practice. After a few weeks of "running drills," students perform and the teacher evaluates their performance. Then, the class comes together as a team to go over the results and use that data to draw up a new game plan for the following week.

If we teach literacy skills and truly focus our efforts on helping students read, write, and think in all subject areas, then our

students will learn the content and be able to make new meaning through original analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and application. Strong skill-based instruction relies on five main elements.

Table 2: Skill-based Instruction

- Data to inform and drive instruction
- Explicit teaching
- High expectations
- Strategic scaffolds for learning
- Continuous reading skill practice

Quindew Reading Solution

Without question, the classroom teacher is the most important asset and resource in the classroom. Quindew doesn't replace a loving teacher. Instead, Quindew enhances reading instruction in the English Language Arts and English classes, supports the explicit teaching of reading skills, and makes it possible for teachers to increase opportunities for students to learn and practice deep reading comprehension skills. The active, close reading skills that are taught directly to students while on Quindew are also available through Quindew's Curriculum Pack. What's unique about the Curriculum Pack is that teachers can use the reading skills to teach the texts they love to teach. They do not have to



change what they teach. The Curriculum Pack defines "how to teach" the reading that is assigned.

Quindew's reading program and Quindew's Curriculum Pack along with classroom teachers who intentionally teach purposeful, explicit reading instruction will develop students into independent readers and critical thinkers, improve student outcomes, and build students' confidence as readers.

Quindew Active Reading

We know that explicit reading instruction and deep reading comprehension practice are necessary for student success. Most reading programs in education provide reading passages with multiple choice questions or reading assessments a few times a year. The goal of these types of reading programs is to teach students how to answer more questions correctly.

Quindew is built on researched-based methodology and skill-based pedagogy. Quindew develops skilled readers who can independently and strategically make decisions that support a given reading task.

The Quindew reading program is markedly different.

Table 3: Top 6 Active Reading Features

1. Quindew explicitly teaches a predictable and transferable reading process.
2. Students read and reread the same text for multiple purposes.
3. Students identify text-evidence and mark their answers in a text like they would in class with a pencil or highlighter.
4. Students have opportunities to learn new knowledge when they get stuck or miss a question.
5. Assessment happens during the learning process; it is natural and engaging.
6. Students enjoy Quindew's high-interest texts and work toward achieving their unique reading goals.

Schools and districts can utilize Quindew to develop rigorous reading programs for their students. First, students can practice active, close reading multiple times a week. They can actively read 60-80 articles each school year. Second, teachers can leverage Quindew's Curriculum Pack to vertically align and facilitate a skills-based curriculum that is supported each week with differentiated lessons and adaptive reading technology. Third, students,



teachers, families, and administrators enjoy up-to-the-minute reading data all year long.

Literacy Geeks' mission is to improve students' reading skills and boost their reading confidence. Skill-based reading instruction is the solution. That is why Quindew was created 8 years ago. It's time to do something different if we expect to see different results in reading scores. It's time for a skill-based revolution.

