

# Reading Instruction for Students Who Are at Risk or Have Disabilities

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*To Beth and Stephen for allowing us the immense professional space required to bring this project to fruition. Without your patience, love, and support this book would not have been possible.*



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# Preface

Between 2000 and 2004 we implemented Project PRIDE, a four-year federal model demonstration project that employed evidence-based practices to prevent reading problems in children who are at risk in three diverse, high-poverty urban schools in Rockford, Illinois. The principals of these schools opted to reverse their course from a more naturalistic reading program and make the commitment to retraining their staff because of a history of chronic reading problems and a teaching environment permeated by failure. Failure rates on the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) for PRIDE schools ranged from 50% to 78%. Over the course of the project, through ongoing student achievement data and a close working relationship with the Rockford educators, we had the opportunity to fine-tune instructional strategies to a degree that would not have been possible without that collaboration.

During the four years of Project PRIDE we gained an even greater appreciation for Louisa Moats' expression, *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science*. On a daily basis we observed that as the human mind acquires the intellectual muscle to learn to read, the teacher must not only know how to carefully teach the sequence of small steps needed for reading at grade level, but also to recognize the missteps that can thwart those efforts. Whether students came to school from high-poverty backgrounds, with no parental support, with learning disabilities or behavior disorders, with medical conditions, from backgrounds of abuse, or without English-speaking skills, most of them were able to learn to read. The research in reading, as described in The Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), provides a clear guide for the use of systematic and explicit instruction to teach the largest number of students to read. In this book we have translated that guide into a detailed blueprint based on 1) explicit, systematic instruction, 2) a multi-tiered teaching approach, 3) data-based decision making, and 4) ongoing professional development.

Project PRIDE was based on the idea that in order to implement effective reading instruction "one size does not fit all." Therefore, we offered student support along a continuum of intensities or instructional tiers. These tiers allowed for maximum access to the general education reading program while providing more intensive instruction on an as-needed basis. The focus in each of those tiers was on skills in the five key areas identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as essential for learning to read. These key areas include phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

In the PRIDE model, Tier 1 was delivered by the general education teacher using a whole-class grouping arrangement. Tier 1 instruction was based on the general education beginning reading programs that were used in the project schools including *Harcourt* (Farr, Strickland, & Beck, 2001) in two of our schools and *Open Court* (Bereiter et al., 1995) in one. We added several research-based teaching enhancements that help children who are at risk learn more efficiently and effectively (Kameenui et al., 2002). These teaching enhancements included the use of advance organizers; unison responses; appropriate level of teacher talk; a perky teaching pace; support for new learning using modeling, guided, and independent practice; careful, systematic correction of student errors; teaching to success; and a student motivational system.

Tier 2 consisted of booster or tutoring sessions that provided extra practice for small groups of two to eight students, working on essential reading skills covered in the school reading series. Students entered Tier 2 when their performance dipped below mastery on monthly or bimonthly curriculum-based assessments, but they still remained in the general education reading program. Tier 2 teachers used the same enhancements used in Tier 1 (e.g., unison response and systematic error correction), but at a different time of day in separate pull-out settings with smaller instructional groups. Tier 2 sessions were carried out by a variety of staff, including general education teachers, Title 1 teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals.

Tier 3 was an intensive alternative reading program (*Reading Mastery*) conducted daily in separate pull-out settings with small, skill-based groups of two to six students. Students placed in Tier 3 had failed to make substantial progress on PRIDE assessments despite extra daily help in Tier 2 booster groups. *Reading Mastery* (Engelmann & Bruner, 1995) was designed specifically for at-risk children in need of a more intensive beginning reading program. The phonetically based *Reading Mastery* curriculum is characterized by a carefully designed instructional sequence as well as multiple scaffolds to facilitate student learning. Tier 3 was taught by Title 1, foreign language, and special education teachers plus a few highly skilled paraprofessionals. Children in Tier 3 received their general education classes either during reading when the rest of the students were involved in reading activities that were at a frustration level for these students, or during a subject matter class such as science or social studies. Children in Tier 3 did participate in general education reading activities, such as vocabulary (done orally) and comprehension (as a listening activity).

Students were assigned to the PRIDE multi-tiered system based on their performance on monthly or bimonthly assessments. The assessment results were summarized by the project coordinator, who then convened a meeting of the teachers to discuss tier placements for the subsequent intervention period.

Early literacy performance was measured primarily using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS; Kaminski & Good, 1996). DIBELS assessments (Good, Gruba, & Kaminski, 2002) have been shown to be an accurate way of identifying children at risk for reading problems and monitoring their progress in phonemic awareness, attainment of the alphabetic principle, and reading fluency. A hallmark of the DIBELS assessments is efficiency, with each measure taking fewer than 5 minutes to give. At a time when the school calendar is increasingly taken up with high-stakes testing, efficiency was an essential quality for us.

Professional development and coaching for teachers and staff who carried out instruction in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 was provided by the two authors of this text. All teachers attended after-school workshops and a series of summer institutes, and received on-site coaching. The after-school workshops and summer institutes were used to introduce various teaching and assessment strategies, allow teachers to observe taped or live models of the strategies, and provide practice for the teachers in small groups using simulated experiences. During on-site coaching visits, data on tier implementation were gathered directly in the classroom; teachers were given feedback on their instruction until they demonstrated competence.

The impetus for writing this text came from the results attained during our four years of PRIDE implementation. Our results showed that all children could make progress toward learning to read when a system of assessments guided staff to identify children who were not responding to instruction, allowing them to meet their individual needs using evidence-based instructional options of varying intensities. The assessment and teaching strategies that were successful in PRIDE are those that occupy the pages of this text. The data shown in Table 1 from one project school and a control school reflect the percentage of children meeting or exceeding standard on the Illinois State Achievement Test.

Note the significant increases from 1999–2000 to 2003–2004, the latter being scores for our first PRIDE cohort. It is interesting that the ISAT scores for our PRIDE school began improving for the 2002–2003 school year, despite the fact that these were students who

**TABLE 1** Percentage of Children Meeting or Exceeding Standard on the Illinois State Achievement Test

Third Grade Reading	1999–2000	2000–20001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
School 1	31	22	15.2	55.2	68.2
Control	39	40	36.4	28.6	39

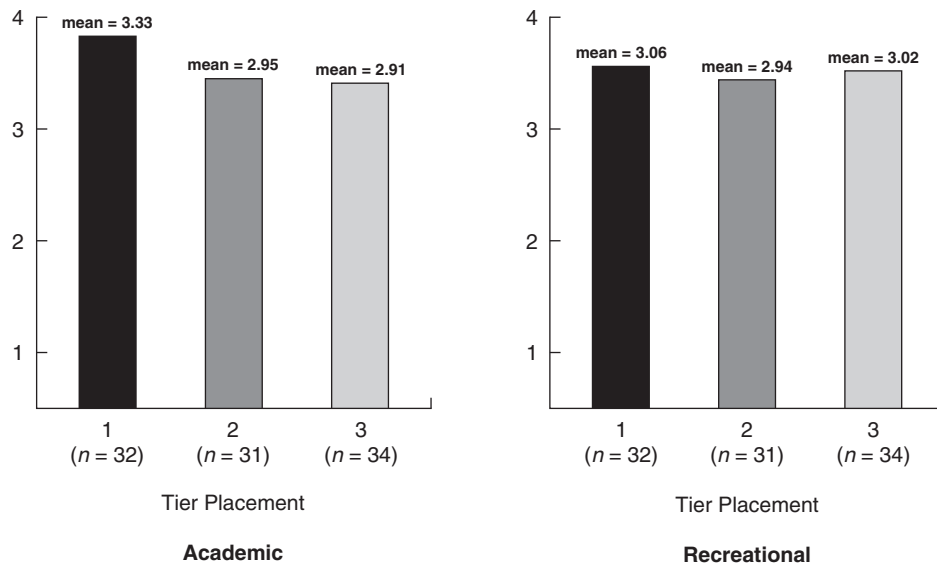
were not officially part of the project. We believe that at least part of that increase resulted because the school, seeing that PRIDE was working so well in the early grades, began to implement some of the same practices in the later grades that were not part of the PRIDE project. Note the rise in achievement at the control school for the 2003–2004 school year. This school began to implement the PRIDE model during that year and provided SRA Reading Mastery to all of its students in Grade 3.

It is clear from these results that more children met state standards in reading as a result of Project PRIDE. It is also true that about 30% of the students did not meet state standards. These were largely students who were receiving support in either Tier 2 or Tier 3. Nonetheless, our results showed that even though many Tier 2 and 3 students did not meet standards, they did make significant gains on all of the DIBELS measures (Bursuck, Smith, Munk, Damer, Mehlig, & Perry, 2004). We knew that grouping according to common skill needs had been criticized for exacerbating achievement differences by lowering expectations and watering down instruction, yet our results indicated that children can make progress in small, heterogeneous pull-out groups if the instruction delivered in those groups is evidence-based and delivered with integrity. Systematic, explicit instruction in our Tier 2 and Tier 3 small groups ensured significant progress for students in both of these groups. For example, effect sizes for all three tiers on all of our early literacy measures were all well over .40, the level at which an effect size is considered significant (Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997). Small, skill-based groups are not a dead end, if done appropriately.

Another common drawback of having different instructional options for children is that racial minorities tend to be overrepresented in the groups of children who are not responding to instruction. In PRIDE, children were assessed five to six times per year using highly efficient assessments directly tied to curricular goals and objectives. These assessments allowed us to make decisions in the best interest of individual children without being influenced by potentially biasing factors such as race. Our results showed that the proportion of African American children served in Tiers 2 and 3 has been no greater than could be expected given their proportion in our school population at large.

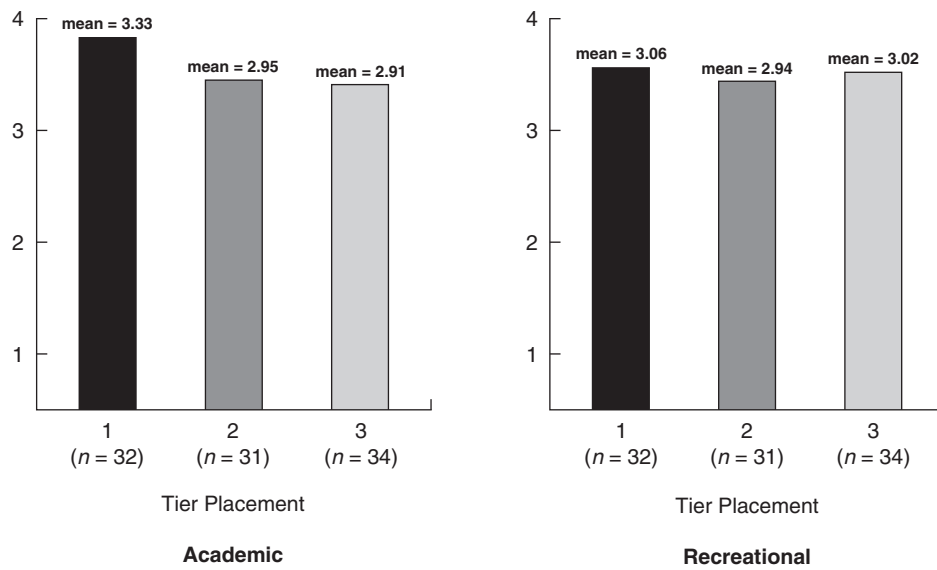
Whatever disagreements exist in the field about how to teach reading, few would argue with the overarching goal of a nation of life-long learners who enjoy reading for information as well as pleasure. We are troubled when educational strategies such as skill-based grouping, pull-out, and drill-practice-and-review are viewed as antithetical to the enjoyment of reading. That criticism is why we surveyed the attitudes of our Tier 1, 2, and 3 children at the end of grades 1 and 2 (McKenna & Kearn, 1990). The results showed that children receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction had positive attitudes toward both academic and recreational reading and that their attitudes were not significantly different from their Tier 1 counterparts. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, all three tiers averaged about 3 on a 4-point scale, with 4 indicating a high positive attitude. Child success, more than where instruction takes place, is what truly matters when it comes to students' attitudes toward reading. We believe we have also demonstrated that drill is one ingredient of an effective reading program for students who are at risk and, if done effectively, can *thrill*—not *kill*.

We know that however positive the results, it is often teacher acceptance of an instructional approach that determines the likelihood that it will continue to be used over time (Polloway, Bursuck, Jayanthi, Epstein, & Nelson, 1996). At the end of each year of the project, we surveyed our teachers to find out their feedback on all aspects of the

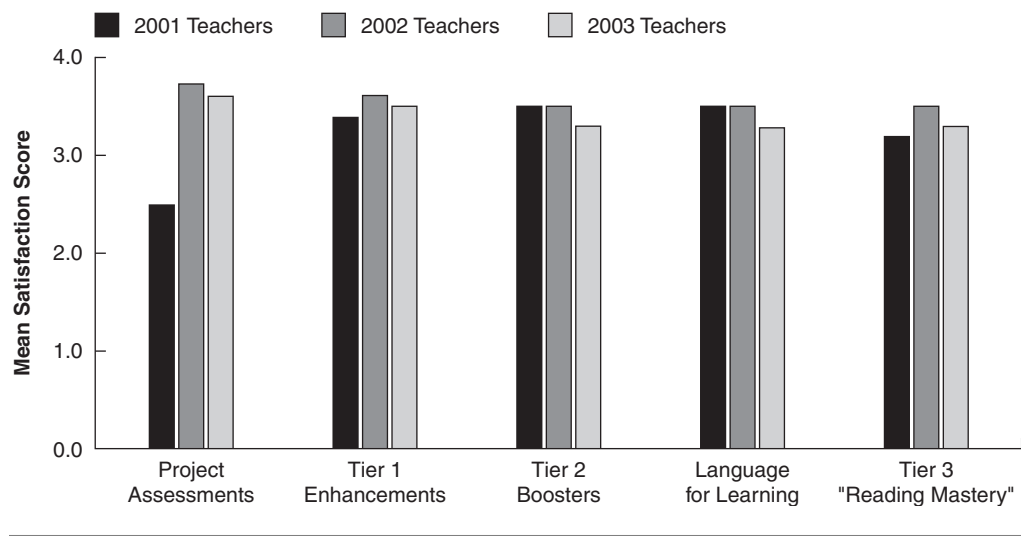


**FIGURE 1** Attitude Toward Reading Scores by Tier Academic and Recreational Reading PRIDE, Grade 1

PRIDE model. Satisfaction was of particular interest to us because of our emphasis on teacher accountability for the reading achievement of each and every student. Our teacher satisfaction results, shown in Figure 3, have been very encouraging, with acceptance ratings after the first year for all parts of the model being consistently rated over 3 on a 4-point scale, with 4 representing the highest satisfaction. In the words of one of our principals, “It is interesting to watch the teachers’ perceptions of Project PRIDE transition from fear and distrust to such high levels of satisfaction now that they are held



**FIGURE 2** Attitude Toward Reading Scores by Tier Academic and Recreational Reading PRIDE, Grade 2



**FIGURE 3** Teacher Satisfaction

directly accountable for student growth. I've watched them quickly develop their capacities to serve all of the learning needs within their classrooms after systematic professional development."

At the conclusion of the project, we asked teachers whether they thought their school should continue to implement Project PRIDE the following year. Twenty-nine, or 85%, of our project teachers responded to the question. Of the 29 teachers who responded, 28 (97%) wanted the project to continue.

Project PRIDE, with its emphases on regular progress monitoring of all students and the provision of a range of instructional supports based on need, is consistent with the provisions of the recent No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The results for children in all three of our tiers showed that 95% of the children made reading progress, and that their attitudes toward reading were positive. Our Title 1, general education, and special education teachers found the model acceptable and the model has been continued beyond the funding period. All of these results have encouraged us to write this book so that other teachers can become empowered to teach children to read who have traditionally been left behind.

## DVD of Teaching Formats Included with this Book

In our work with teachers, the following concern was repeatedly raised: "Everyone talks and writes about how I should teach reading, but it would be such a help to actually see these skills being taught to children." That concern provided the impetus for producing this companion DVD. The video footage shows a teacher using the reading formats from the book to teach critical reading skills to students in a small group classroom situation. Viewers can refer to the text as they watch phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word reading, vocabulary and passage reading with comprehension being taught. For easy reference, menus on the DVD identify each format and reference the specific table in the book in which the teaching skill is introduced.

## Acknowledgments

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## DVD Acknowledgments

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