



STRIVING READERS – SEPTEMBER 2010

FUSION READING™ IS
THE CENTERPIECE OF
OUR NEW ADOLESCENT
LITERACY PROJECT IN
MICHIGAN.

STRIVING READERS

Institute for Research on Adolescent Literacy

Researchers at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning are hoping a new project launching in classrooms this fall will prove to be a door of opportunity for struggling adolescent readers. The Striving Readers project in Michigan will test the effectiveness of Fusion Reading™, a comprehensive program designed by the Center's researchers to significantly improve the reading performance of adolescents who have fallen far behind their peers. Fusion Reading bundles strategies for identifying and understanding individual words as well as for understanding entire written passages into one comprehensive package.

"We wanted to go as deep as we could with fewer strategies over an extended period of time," says Mike Hock, co-principal investigator and associate director of the Center. "So, it's not a six-month program or a year program. It's a two-year program and, possibly for some populations,

may be even a three-year program." Results of smaller studies of Fusion Reading give reason to believe the current project will fare well. In one study, Hock's observations of 22 teachers working with challenged students in Fusion Reading classrooms found highly engaged students, indicating both students and teachers were comfortable with the program. In addition, researchers have completed an evaluation of the effect of Fusion Reading after just one year. Results showed 85 middle school students who struggled with reading scored much higher than comparison students on two standardized tests.

"The next measure is to answer the 'So what?' question," Hock says. "If they're engaged in doing these strategies, and early studies show promise, can we demonstrate the effectiveness of Fusion Reading in a rigorous experiment? That's what we're hoping to show with the Michigan Striving Readers project."

PROJECT GOALS

1. To determine the effects of a multi-component reading intervention on the reading performance of adolescent struggling readers.
2. To conduct a rigorous independent random assignment controlled study of the intervention.

DURATION OF PROJECT

The four-year Striving Readers project began in October 2009 with several months for planning. Classroom instruction begins in Fall 2010.

FUNDING AGENCY

Michigan Department of Education based on an award from the U.S. Department of Education





Fusion Reading has its roots in the very beginning of the Center's work, growing out of the successes of the Strategic Instruction Model®, a comprehensive collection of instructional tools and learning strategies that aim to improve adolescent literacy and academic achievement.

"It's building on the work we've done with all of the learning strategies that have been developed here at the Center, starting with *Word Identification, Self-Questioning, and Paraphrasing*," says Hock.

Hock and his colleagues packaged Fusion Reading's redesigned learning tools in a way they hope will be feasible for teachers to use in their teaching and effective for student learning.

"I think the outcome really is more than whether or not Fusion Reading is a good program," Hock says. "It's what have we learned through the last 30 years in terms of interventions for students who struggle in learning."

The Michigan Department of Education will lead the four-year Striving Readers study, which will involve nine schools, nine teachers, and 2,500 students. SRI International,

a private research center based in Menlo Park, Calif., will provide an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

Planning began in October 2009 when project staff met with school representatives to explain the project and conduct screenings of students who had been identified as struggling readers to verify that they were at least two years behind in reading level to qualify for inclusion in the project. In June, staff conducted an orientation for all of the teachers who will participate in the project; participants also included an administrator from each school. Staff reviewed the overall plan and goals for the project, described Fusion Reading, and summarized what we know about struggling readers.

Each teacher left the orientation session with a laptop, a Flip video camera, and an assignment to shoot personal videos throughout the summer. During the next three years, these tools will be used to explore a new approach to professional development: distance coaching.

"We really think that looking at yourself teaching is a powerful professional development tool, and we're going to test that out in this project," Hock says.

Aaron Sumner, the Center's director of technology for research and development, and Amber Nutt, program assistant-online coordinator, showed teachers how to use these tools, combined with iChat, to share and discuss videos online. This "what I did this summer" video assignment will help teachers become familiar with the tools and comfortable with the process in a low-stress way.

Once the school year begins, project staff will mix traditional and new methods of professional development: Hock and Irma Brasseur-Hock, co-principal investigator, will conduct Fusion Reading workshops; Sue Woodruff and Pam Leitzell, who are coaches and members of the SIM International Professional Development Network affiliated with the Center, will conduct on-site coaching and follow up after the workshops; and everyone will participate in iChat sessions.

Distance coaching and technology aside, the real test for this project is whether Fusion Reading will make a significant difference in the reading performance of students in middle schools and high schools.

"It's very difficult to move the needle with middle school and most difficult to move it with high school students," Hock says. "They live very complicated lives. We're hoping we can get them to attend Fusion Reading classes long enough to find out that reading is not as bad as they may have anticipated and that we're trying to put together a class that reflects what they want out of life and supports their goals."

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project will employ a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) design with middle and high school students assigned to either Fusion Reading or a control condition. Two cohorts of students will be taught over the course of the project. SRI will be the independent evaluator.

ADDED VALUE

Striving Readers project staff hope the study will result in several additional benefits for students, teachers, and professional developers.

STUDENTS

Fusion Reading may be the ticket to help students extend their education to technical school, community college, or four-year colleges and beyond that to satisfying careers. "I really hope students will learn that they can be better readers, that they can improve upon the skills that they have, and that when they have this basic literacy skill in their belt, that it's going to open the door of opportunity," Hock says.

TEACHERS

Hock and his colleagues have packaged the Fusion Reading program with teachers in mind. They hope teachers will like the program, will find it feasible to teach, and will appreciate that it brings structure to their classrooms while allowing them to be creative in their teaching. These outcomes are critical to the long-term and far-reaching success of the program.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPERS

The Fusion Reading program represents a new way of thinking about professional development for SIM reading strategies. In the past, much of the work in this area meant presenting workshops focused on individual strategies. Fusion Reading combines strategies into a powerful and comprehensive reading program that requires a new professional development model. Project staff are developing the tools, materials, and activities to support professional developers in this new model.

PERSONNEL

KU-CRL Staff:

Don Deshler, *principal investigator*

Mike Hock, *co-principal investigator*

Irma Brasseur-Hock, *co-principal investigator*

Aaron Sumner, *director of technology for research and development*

Amber Nutt, *program assistant-online coordinator*

Jackie Schafer, *research assistant*

Sue Woodruff, *SIM® professional developer and coach*

Pam Leitzell, *SIM® professional developer and coach*

Ruth Isaia, *Michigan Department of Education, project lead*

Ellen Shiller, *SRI International*

Sara Kalb, *SRI International*

Xin Wei, *SRI International*

Jose Blackorby, *SRI International*

