

Florida Center for Reading Research

The Reading Edge

What is The Reading Edge?

The Reading Edge is a comprehensive reading curriculum for middle school readers. It was designed for students of diverse backgrounds and achievement levels, including English language learners, special education students, students reading below grade level, students reading at or above grade level, and gifted students. The two instructional levels of the Reading Edge include Stage One, Grade 1 reading level, and Stage Two, Grades 2.1 to 8 reading levels. The program's goals are to help students become more strategic readers by advancing their word-recognition techniques, improving their reading comprehension, building their vocabulary, improving their reading fluency, and teaching them to respond to text effectively using the writing process. Students reading at grade level work primarily on vocabulary development and comprehension strategies. Students working below grade level focus on instruction specific to their needs.

Students are grouped by their instructional reading levels (as determined through pretest scores on the Gates MacGinitie or the Scholastic Reading Inventory), assessed at regular intervals, and moved up as they master each level of instruction. The teacher instructs in a whole-class format, though cooperative learning strategies are used throughout and student to student interaction in pairs and teams is included in the lesson plans and materials. *The Reading Edge* recommends a common school-wide reading block, facilitating the movement of students from one level to another, and lessons are designed for a 60 minute time period.

The instructional sequence in levels 1 through 8 of *The Reading Edge* is clearly outlined in the program's Scope and Sequence. Levels 1 through 3 are remedial and most students begin with Level 4. Level 1 focuses on fundamental reading skills with an emphasis on figuring out individual words and monitoring comprehension. Levels 2 and 3 include fluency, strategies, comprehension skills, vocabulary and word recognition, and writing. Levels 4 through 8 add story structure, literary techniques, purposes for writing, and the writing process.

Stage One provides non-readers with instruction in basic decoding and literal comprehension strategies using stories with decodable text that increase in difficulty as the students progress. Lessons 1-3 are taught by the teacher reading a story aloud and introducing students to the basic format of the daily lessons and to the types of activities used throughout Stage One. Lessons 4-37 (Pre-Primer and Primer level) are 2-day lesson plans that include Warm-Ups, On Your Mark, Get Set..., Go!, and Cool Down. Warm-ups begin the day's instruction with letter sound and vocabulary review and fluency practice. On Your Mark activities teach auditory recognition and discrimination of sound in spoken words, sound to symbol association, and blending and segmenting words. Get Set...focuses on pre-teaching vocabulary and building comprehension of stories. Green word cards are used in letter sound games where students 'stretch and read' to sound out phonetically regular words; red word cards introduce irregular words with a strategy called 'say-spell-say'; and finally, exercises in using context clues to figure out other words are presented. "Readles" (pictures of words) are used in the stories to illustrate some words. In the segment called Go!, partners read aloud from the decodable text, clarify misunderstandings, and take turns retelling the lesson's story. In Cool Down paired students practice stretching words to hear sounds, count sounds, practice writing and spelling words, and on Day 2 take a

spelling test. In Lessons 38-48 (Grade 1 to beginning of Grade 2 level) the 3-day lesson changes minimally: students write dictated sentences (rather than sounds and nonsense words), background information and challenging vocabulary are presented, the length of the stories increase, students use semantic organizers to retell main ideas, and students are assessed on story comprehension as well as spelling words.

Levels 2 and 3 units are divided into four types: Foundation units, Strategy units, Skill units, and Reader's Theatre units. Foundation units set up the instructional routines that comprise all other units. Strategy units include comprehension strategies such as clarifying, summarizing, predicting and questioning. Skills units include direct instruction in five decoding skills and introduce the character of Chef Read More, who helps students decode words using cooking tools, including the peeler (used to separate prefixes and suffixes from base words), the chopper (used to separate compound words into smaller words), the scrubber (removes the silent *e* from the end of a word when a suffix is added), the ice cream scoop (doubles the final consonant when a suffix is added to some words), and the meat grinder (changes a *y* to an *i* when a suffix is added to some words). Reader's Theatre is intended to strengthen fluency skills as students prepare a readers theatre performance.

In Levels 2 and 3 the lesson format uses a six-day cycle of instruction, with day six reserved for formal assessment. During days one through five, the class follows a specified instructional sequence as they read one book (high-interest fiction, nonfiction, and reader's theatre) together. This sequence begins with Teacher Background, or a lesson summary including enrichment information. In Set the Stage (timing goal of 10 minutes), the teacher presents the day's reading goal or the main strategy or skill that will be taught that day and Today's Big Question, whose purpose is to help students focus on basic comprehension of the day's reading. Active Instruction (timing goal of 20 minutes) is divided into five subsections: Build Background, Skill or Strategy Instruction, Listening Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Vocabulary Development. The teacher helps the students build background knowledge using a KWL chart or other graphic organizer, instructs and models the day's strategy or skill, revisits the day's reading goal, reads aloud from the day's text with explicit Think-Alouds and fluency modeling, presents 3 Word Mastery Lists for the week's vocabulary instruction, assists students in rating their knowledge of words, providing definitions and examples, and sometimes plays vocabulary-building games with the students. The vocabulary lists include List 1 (words that the student will encounter and must be prepared to read and spell), List 2 (words the students will encounter and must be able to read), and List 3 (challenge list of difficult words pulled from throughout the book). In the Teamwork (timing goal of 20 minutes) segment of instruction students practice the targeted skill and new vocabulary. This segment is divided into Partner Reading and Team Discussion. In Partner Reading students continue to read the book, helping one another with difficult words and rereading the same text multiple times to correct errors and improve fluency. During Team Discussion the students answer literal comprehension questions about the passage, discuss the questions as a team, and write a short answer to one question. Time for Reflection (timing goal of 10 minutes) is a whole-class review of each Team's answers to the comprehension questions, a guided oral reading of the vocabulary word lists, and the assignment of the day's homework. The homework assignments in Levels 2 and 3 include a second- or third-grade level reading passage containing words the students are currently studying. Students practice reading this passage each night, focusing on reading smoothly, with expression, obeying punctuation, and increasing reading rate to at least 90 or 100 words per minute. Homework also includes a daily

vocabulary exercise such as writing sentences using words from the Word Lists, using a vocabulary word while answering a question about the night's reading passage, and extra credit for reporting on seeing or hearing specified vocabulary words in other classes or outside school. The final question of the day asks students to reflect on what they have learned, whether it was easy or hard, and how it will help them to become better readers.

Instruction in Levels 4 through 8 follows a similar pattern to Lessons 2 and 3 with a few exceptions. Texts read in each cycle include short stories, novels, poetry, and nonfiction. In these levels, the day's Big Question connects the reading to the students' experiences and is the focus of discussion during Time for Reflection. Active Instruction is divided into four subsections: Build Background, Skill Instruction, Listening Comprehension, and Vocabulary Introduction. The teacher helps students connect what they already know about the topic to the day's reading, provides direct instruction of a reading skill or strategy, reads aloud from the text, modeling fluent reading and Think Alouds, and introduces the eight vocabulary words for the cycle. Students review these words and complete vocabulary activities during the Vocabulary Review at the end of the lesson. Formal Assessment is conducted on day five and Writing on day six. The Writing Project, an open-ended response to the text, includes prewriting, drafting, peer feedback, and revision.

In Reading Levels 2 and 3, Formal Assessment on day 6 of each cycle includes a spelling test, a multiple choice and short answer test based on a 150-200 word passage featuring words from the week's vocabulary lists, and a vocabulary exercise. Twice a quarter students' fluency is assessed through a timed reading passage; every eight weeks students' reading levels are measured using a commercially published assessment instrument such as the Scholastic Reading Inventory or the Gates MACGinitie Reading Test or SFAF's 4Sight Benchmark Assessment. Informal assessment tools include the Learning Guide, a chart for student use, the record book, a teacher log for tracking student progress, and the Quarterly Assessment Summary (QAS), a snapshot of each student's success. In Reading Levels 4 through 8, Formal Assessment includes written answers to skill questions, a cycle test, homework, and the Writing Project. Informal assessments include fluency checks, reading comprehension strategies and skills, class participation, and use of graphic organizers.

Materials include teacher manuals with detailed lesson plans for forty weeks of instruction at each reading level, cycle tests, and student materials including homework and vocabulary lists. Stage One materials also include 232 phonics picture cards and word cards as well as decodable books called Shared Stories. The program is built around classroom sets of trade books that schools purchase through a commercial vendor.

How is The Reading Edge aligned with Current Reading Research?

All of the five essential reading components are comprehensively addressed in *The Reading Edge*. In Stage One Phonemic Awareness and Phonics instruction are accelerated and combined in a way that may be effective for non-readers who are adolescents. Letter sounds are introduced explicitly and systematically, with most useful and most common letter-sound correspondences introduced first, and letters that are visually and auditorily similar are separated. In the On Your Mark segment of the lesson, detailed directions begin by introducing the letter with a 'tongue twister' such as *Mark and Mary make a mess mixing milkshakes*. The class identifies the sound and its corresponding letter. Next the lesson offers a multisensory approach to letter introduction. For example, students are asked to, "*Notice the shape of your mouth*."

Are your lips pushing forward or pulling back at the corners when you say /a/? Yes, your mouth is kind of smiling. Let's think about what your tongue is doing, too. Is it flattening out in the bottom of your mouth or is the tip lifting up?" This approach to phonemic awareness is intended to strengthen auditory discrimination and help students become aware of which mouth actions produce speech sounds. Students listen to sets of words with and without pictures and indicate whether they hear the sound in the word or not. Blending and segmenting are practiced daily during the 'say it fast' and 'break it down' segment of the lesson. There are daily cumulative reviews of previously taught letter sounds and words, and students are provided with daily reading practice with connected text in the Shared Stories (decodable books). After letter-sounds have been mastered, letter combinations are taught, and finally sound to symbol association is taught in a daily spelling exercise.

Fluency practice is an integral part of the daily lesson plan in every level and accuracy, speed and prosody are all emphasized during a rereading exercise. The teacher models fluent reading daily, reading goals are clear, students read text at their instructional level, and both peer and teacher feedback is given daily. Fluency is measured through timed reading assessments two times each quarter. In levels 2-8 fluency is practiced in the daily Partner Reading, where students continue to help each other identify and decode unfamiliar words and confusing passages. Levels 4-6 include read aloud sections for fluency practice which becomes silent reading practice as students move up to levels 7-8.

Vocabulary instruction is explicit and systematic with daily review and practice activities both in whole group instruction and with partners. The program uses color coding to teach words as phonetically regular or irregular. Group-reviewed words are placed on a Word Wall and partners practice reading words from the Game Plan in preparation for reading these words to the teacher for a score. Daily reading of text provides cumulative review of vocabulary and students are instructed in word meaning strategies including recognizing and using context clues, analyzing multisyllabic words, and using structural clues such as prefixes, suffixes, and base words to determine meaning. There is an emphasis on both reading and writing vocabulary and students are exposed to vocabulary through both fiction and informational text.

Metacognition is the focus of all levels of instruction in *The Reading Edge* as teachers present an explanation of each strategy and its purpose, model the strategy in the reading context, provide group practice and then partner practice, and daily reflect with students *why*, *when*, and *how* to use reading strategies. The program is based on a cooperative learning model and comprehension instruction is centered on the reciprocal teaching strategies of clarifying, predicting, summarizing and questioning. These strategies are explicitly taught, then modeled, and students are given ample practice opportunities for integrating their use. Lesson plans specifically guide teachers to assist students in building background knowledge, setting a purpose for reading, and self-monitoring their reading comprehension. Detailed Think-Aloud examples for the teacher are provided. Graphic organizers are scaffolded throughout the lessons and include The Idea Tree for summarizing informational text and a Story Map for helping students learn the basic structure of narrative text. Explicit instruction of reading strategies and skills includes identifying main idea and supporting details, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing cause and effect, identifying problem and solution, drawing conclusion, and analyzing story elements. Strategy instruction and practice are plentiful and students are encouraged daily to reflect on how their use of strategies has helped their reading.

Both narrative and expository text are included in a variety of text structures at appropriate readability levels.

Professional development is provided in a two-day initial training for teachers which focuses on the instructional strategies, routines, assessments, and cooperative-learning strategies, and provides support for administration and district personnel. Ongoing coaching and support is provided in quarterly coaching visits, follow-up telephone meetings, and unlimited, informal telephone support for all staff members.

Research Support for The Reading Edge

The Reading Edge is the reading component of the Success for All Middle School Project. The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) is currently evaluating this project, but no empirical research has been conducted to document the effectiveness of *The Reading Edge* component. However, *The Reading Edge* is based on instructional practices in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension that are strongly rooted in scientific research. Future studies that employ control groups and have sound experimental designs will help determine the effectiveness of *The Reading Edge*.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *The Reading Edge*:

- Goals and objectives are clearly stated in each day's lesson plan and the scope and sequence gives teachers an accurate overall picture of the program.
- Instruction is explicit and systematic and the 5 components of reading are well-integrated.
- Instructional routines are teacher friendly and consistent.
- Practice opportunities are ample.
- Teacher modeling and scaffolding are prominent parts of every lesson and detailed teacher instructions for implementation are provided.
- High quality award-winning trade books are used in this literature-rich curriculum.
- In addition to the 5 components of reading, the dimensions of spelling, writing, oral language, and listening comprehension are addressed.
- Teacher Editions provide detailed, well-organized, and easy to understand lesson plans with detailed directions for teachers.

Weaknesses of *The Reading Edge*:

- The quantity of materials for eight levels of instruction may require extensive organization.
- Stage One requires the teacher to select and supply books for read-aloud, though suggestions are included in the lesson plans.
- Trade books and assessments must be purchased from a separate vendor.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement The Reading Edge?

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For More Information

http://www.bps.k12.mt.us/schools/bms/reading_edge_files/frame.htm#slide0002.htm

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