

# Florida Center for Reading Research

Soar to Success

## What is Soar to Success?

*Soar to Success* is a reading intervention for students in grades 3-8 who are reading below grade level. It is used in addition to a school's core reading program. Two primary goals of this intervention are: to accelerate students' reading ability, and, to help students to quickly and easily apply the comprehension and decoding strategies they have learned to other content area texts. The ultimate goal of *Soar to Success* however, is to increase students' understanding of what they read through an approach called reciprocal teaching. Essentially, reciprocal teaching is a lively dialogue between the teacher and the students where students are taught to use the cognitive strategies of summarizing, clarifying, questioning, and predicting. *Soar to Success* lends itself to a variety of settings and may be taught by classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, and other educators. The components of each grade level include 18 literature books, a comprehensive, highly detailed teacher's guide, assessments including an Informal Reading Inventory and protocols for oral reading fluency and retelling, an aligned student guide, posters of the strategies and graphic organizers, and a staff development video. A phonics/decoding screener is also available as well as additional phonics lessons to accompany each book for students in need of extra support.

Instruction for *Soar to Success* occurs in small groups of 5-7 students that meet daily for 30-40 minute lessons for 18 weeks. Each lesson consists of five parts: Revisiting, Reviewing, Rehearsing, Reading and Reciprocal teaching, and Responding/Reflecting. Students read one book for four to five consecutive lessons, with a specific chunk of the book as the focus of each lesson.

Revisiting, the first part of a *Soar to Success* lesson, is the time for students to reread self-selected *Soar to Success* books for fluency development. Teachers use this time for informal assessment by checking students' oral reading fluency or by checking their comprehension through retelling. On alternate days, a group conference is held for students to share details from their self-selected books.

Reviewing is the moment for students to discuss the reciprocal teaching strategies and relate to the others their use of these strategies in other content area classes. Additionally, through the use of their graphic organizer students summarize the section of the book that was read in the previous day's lesson.

Rehearsing provides an introduction to the section of the book to be read for that day. This is accomplished by a teacher-led guided preview, a cooperative preview that involves students working in pairs with the teacher observing, or an independent preview performed by the students themselves. A purpose for reading is set during this moment of the lesson based on students' predictions.



Reading and Reciprocal Teaching refer to the time when students read silently. A discussion of the text and their understanding of the reading unfold through the use of the four reciprocal teaching strategies: summarization, clarification, questioning and prediction.

The final part of the lesson, Responding/Reflecting, is an opportunity for students to complete their graphic organizers and their written reflections. To conclude, students may discuss and/or share their reflections and summarizations, bringing closure to that day's lesson.

### How is *Soar to Success* aligned with Reading First?

*Soar to Success* contains instruction in four of the critical components of reading outlined by the National Reading Panel and Reading First: phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Comprehension instruction however, is the primary thrust of *Soar to Success* and it is designed to develop in students an awareness of where and when to apply specific strategies to independently unlock the meaning of the texts and books they read.

*Soar to Success* lessons are structured, fast paced, collaborative in nature, and contain high amounts of teacher-student interactions. Pedagogical features helpful to struggling readers include explicit instruction, scaffolding, modeling through a think-aloud process, repeated opportunities for practice, and cumulative review. Initially, lessons contain strong teacher support to familiarize students with the strategies. Gradually, a shift in responsibility occurs and the teacher's role becomes less prominent as the students take more responsibility for learning.

The reciprocal teaching strategies in *Soar to Success* encourage students to make predictions about text they will read, seek clarification of words or ideas that are not understood, generate questions about their reading, and summarize what they have read. The strategies are used frequently and in varying order throughout each day's lesson. The teacher reminds students to be prepared to explain which strategies they used as they read and questions them during discussion about strategy use. After reading, students are urged to think about and provide a written response to what they read, indicating the particular strategy used and where in the text the strategy was helpful. An objective of the *Soar to Success* intervention is for young readers to choose strategies with intention. Developing an awareness of which strategies are needed to solve certain problems and acquiring proficiency in their use is important (Palincsar, & Klenk, 1992) since it prepares students to address the academic tasks that confront them in other content area classes.

Conscious strategy use in *Soar to Success lessons* is developed in a variety of ways. In order to build background knowledge before reading, the preview directs students' attention to specific vocabulary words, illustrations, graphics, captions, headings, key ideas, and text structure. Literal and inferential questioning strategies that cue, prompt or lead students to focus on main ideas or key concepts are modeled continuously during a lesson. Vocabulary meaning and word pronunciation are made evident with the clarifying strategy. For each lesson, the student guide provides a graphic organizer to clarify words or ideas in writing. A semantic map is used to increase understanding of vocabulary and important concepts. Other graphic organizers such as story maps, story frames, event maps, and KWL charts enable students to summarize what they have read.

Students develop fluency through repeated readings of familiar text during the first part of the lesson, Revisiting, and again during Reading and Reciprocal Teaching. Leveled books offer students the opportunity to read easier texts that gradually increase in difficulty. Learning to decode longer words with the clarifying strategy is meant to assist students in a more accurate, fluent reading of the text.

Although phonics instruction is not an emphasis of *Soar to Success*, students are taught to look at word patterns or chunks of words they do not know with the clarifying strategy. For students in need of extra phonics support, Optional Day Lesson Plans that accompany each book are available in the back of the teacher's guide. Primarily, these lessons teach students two strategies for difficult words: Decoding Longer Words which helps them to divide words in syllables or chunks, and, Making Words which develops letter/sound knowledge through letter manipulation.

The role of the teacher is critical in *Soar to Success* lessons. Given the gradual release of responsibility inherent in the program, teacher expertise in scaffolding student understanding is crucial. Teachers must be adept at determining when to give students extra support to master a task. Understanding the concept of a student's zone of proximal development is essential. In a review of the research, Pressley, Symons, McGoldrick, & Snyder (1995) emphasize the importance of scaffolding since struggling readers have difficulty with self-generated questions. There are important considerations for Reading First schools that choose *Soar to Success* as an intervention. Students who lag severely behind their grade level peers may need a comprehensive intervention with intensive phonics work before instruction with *Soar to Success*. The developers of the program suggest that English language learners should have an intermediate level of fluency before receiving instruction with this program.

Professional development for *Soar to Success* exists on many levels. The teacher's manual provides extensive detail pertaining to instruction of the program. A video and 2-3 hours of inservice training are included with the purchase of the program and are to be used interactively with the manual. The program developers highly encourage continuing staff development in the form of monthly meetings and provide an outline of suggested topics in the manual. The manual also includes information for schools to develop a coaching plan based on research by Joyce and Showers (1981). Extra professional development courses are available for a fee.

### Research Support for Soar to Success

Research support for *Soar to Success* was derived from Project Success, an intervention study designed by the developers of the program to accelerate reading for struggling readers in the upper grades. The goal of the developers was to create a program based on strategies with a sound research base, such as reciprocal teaching and the use of graphic organizers.

During the 1995-1996 school year, the model of instruction that serves as the basis of Project Success was field-tested. Due to the important gains that students achieved in levels of retelling and oral reading fluency, a more carefully controlled study was implemented during the 1996-1997 academic year. Fourth grade students identified as reading one to three years below level were chosen for the study from large metropolitan and rural areas across the United States. Students in both the experimental group and the control group included various ethnic groups, students in special and regular education, and second language learners. The final sample consisted of 345 students who were randomly assigned within each site to an experimental group (n=185) and a control group (n=165). The Qualitative Reading Inventory-II (QRI-II) (Leslie, & Caldwell, 1995) and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (MacGinitie, & MacGinitie, 1989a, 1989b) were used for pre-testing and post-testing.

Instruction for Project Success began in early October with daily, 40-minute lessons that supplemented the regular classroom reading program. The 5-part lesson plan is described in the beginning of this report. On average, instruction lasted for 76 days. The goal of the intervention was for children to demonstrate mastery of grade level material. The students in Project Success were taught using three different models: pullout groups, in-class groups, and extended day groups. No attempt was made to control the fact that some students in the control groups were given extra support through Title I or other programs.

Analyses indicated that randomization was successful and that groups did not differ on any pretest measures. Findings from an overall test of outcome results were significant in favor of the children who received the intervention. Reliably higher scores were found on the QRI-II retelling, questioning, and oral reading as well as the Gates-MacGinitie comprehension; no significant differences were found for Gates-MacGinitie vocabulary. Overall, across 12 of 13 sites, 57% of intervention children reached competence on grade level text as compared to 18% of control children. Post hoc analyses to determine if there were varied results for children who received the intervention in a pull-out versus in-class format revealed no significant differences. One limitation to this study was that analyses were conducted at the level of individual children, whereas the study involved a nested design (i.e., intervention occurred at the level of class, not student).

In conclusion, the design and content of the program reflect a solid research base and there is a relatively strong beginning level of evidence for the program's efficacy. Additional high quality research by independent investigators will further extend and support the positive effects demonstrated by Project Success.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Soar to Success*:

- The highly organized, all-inclusive nature of the teacher's manual will serve as a helpful guide throughout the program.
- *Soar to Success* lessons use high interest, age-appropriate books with narrative and expository text.
- The strategies used in reciprocal teaching have a validated research base.
- The teacher connects comprehension strategy use to the deeper understanding of other content area texts. If students recognize the strategies as a means to understanding these texts, then they realize that strategies are a requisite part of reading.
- The graphic organizers that accompany the lessons can be effective tools for visually representing the key concepts and ideas of the reading.
- Strong teacher support is gradually faded to facilitate students' independence in the reading process.
- Ongoing assessment with oral reading fluency and retell checks help guide instruction.

### Weaknesses of *Soar to Success*:

- None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement Soar to Success?

Alachua	352-955-7880	Martin	772-219-1200
Baker	904-259-0401	Monroe	305-293-1400
Bay	850-872-7700	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Brevard	321-633-1000	Okeechobee	863-462-5000
Broward	754-321-2600	Orange	407-317-3202
Citrus	352-726-1931	Osceola	407-870-4008
Collier	239-377-0212	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Dade	305-995-1428	Pasco	813-794-2648
Duval	904-390-2115	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Glades	863-946-2083	Polk	863-534-0521
Hernando	352-797-7001	St. Johns	904-819-7502
Hillsborough	813-272-4022	St. Lucie	772-429-3925
Indian River	772-564-3150	Sarasota	941-927-9000
Lee	239-337-8301	Seminole	407-320-0006
Marion	352-671-7702		

## For More Information

<http://www.eduplace.com/intervention/soar/index.html>

## References



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Lead Reviewer: Michelle Wahl, M.S.  
Date Posted: June, 2004

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