

# researchsnapshot

## The Literacy Needs of Adolescents In Their Own Words



**Source of Research:** Pitcher, S., Martinez, G., Dicembre, E., Fewster, D., McCormick, M. (2010). *The literacy needs of adolescents in their own words*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 53(8), International Reading Association.

### What is this research about?

Many adolescents struggle with literacy and they require adequate supports to enable their success. This study explores the type of literacy instruction that adolescents receive. The alignment between adolescent students' literacy needs and the instructional interventions that are provided are evaluated through seven case studies. In addition, the researchers investigated the information that can be garnered from parents to assist in developing appropriate interventions and instructional supports for students.

### What did the researchers do?

A research team decided to look more closely at the upward trend of adolescents seeking reading help through the university reading clinic. Seven case studies were analyzed to help researchers understand whether literacy instruction meet students' learning needs. Adolescents who were involved in this study were selected because they attended the reading clinic for 12 weeks in the spring of 2008. Assessments were administered to participating students to measure their comprehension levels and their motivation to read. In addition, students and their parents were interviewed using parallel questions so that the information could be compared and contrasted. This information was used to help to answer the research questions. The data was analyzed to determine researcher-identified recurring themes. Based on the similarities and differences, the researchers explored the type of reading instruction students received, whether the adolescents received the needed instruction, and what role parents could play in literacy education. The researchers make some suggestions to better align adolescents' reading needs with targeted supports.

### What you need to know...

- Improving adolescent literacy is an important issue that requires immediate attention.
- Students require personalized, targeted interventions to help them develop the required comprehension skills so that they are able to navigate non-fiction texts.
- Parents and teachers can work together to share their observations and develop plans to support students.
- Incorporating choice and technology might produce better results for students.

### What did the researchers find?

All of the students who attended the university reading clinic struggled with reading comprehension issues. These students did not share any demographic or school history experiences. While the type of school these students attended varied greatly and their ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds were very diverse, these students experienced many of the same reading challenges. None of these students received the required targeted support in their school settings. They struggled, particularly in reading content areas.

### Researchers' suggestions:

- 1 Teaching students strategies that allow them to better understand expository texts provides students more access to learning across real-life situations and the opportunity to experience greater success. Non-fiction reading will be the most significant type of reading for students as they grow. Students identified that they frequently engage in reading self-selected texts online and they are able to understand these texts. This is fertile ground upon which to build.
- 2 Giving students a choice in their reading and using current, online resources may lead to greater literacy gains for adolescents.
- 3 Involving parents in discussions regarding the literacy needs of their children enables teachers to collect additional information and to design better interventions for students. This team approach may help to focus the conversation on the needs of students and not just enrolling them in "magic bullet" programs.
- 4 Incorporating more technology into instruction in a variety of ways helps to support struggling readers.

**In what ways do you support the literacy needs of students in your classroom?**