



New Heights and the Essential Dimensions of Reading

Teachers of struggling readers are faced with a difficult challenge, particularly as students reach middle and upper grades, which is “not only to develop positive attitudes toward reading and writing but also to transform the negative and often hostile attitudes that these children bring along with them. This is not an easy task and can require a great deal of determination and stamina.” *Classrooms that Work*, p.36

New Heights is designed to jump-start students who are reading at least one year below their grade level and build comprehension, fluency, and confidence. New Heights can improve students’ attitudes to reading, enhance students’ self-esteem through steady success and provide students with the skills to achieve reading success on their own.

Phonemic Awareness, Phonics and Word Recognition

It is widely agreed that the heaviest emphasis on phonics and phonemic awareness should be in kindergarten and grade 1;

- “Phonemic awareness instruction can help essentially all of your students to read, including preschoolers, kindergarteners, first graders who are just starting to read, and older, less able readers.” *Put Reading First*, p. 8
- “The effects of systematic phonics programs were significant and substantial in kindergarten and the 1st grade, indicating that systematic phonics programs should be implemented at those age and grade levels.” *National Reading Panel Report: Summary*, p. 10

The New Heights program is designed to be used with struggling readers who have attained some basic reading skills. The students using the program will:

- be able to recognize the English alphabet and its sounds
- be able to recognize basic high-frequency words
- have attained at least a grade one reading level

“Since transitional and fluent readers already have ways to work out most unfamiliar words, they should be directing more attention to understanding how elements of stories, factual texts, and poems work together as wholes.” *On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K–3*, p. 39.

- **Fluency**

“Fluent readers are able to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Fluency is one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension.” *National Reading Panel Report: Summary*, p. 11

The New Heights program aims to build fluency through audio-assisted reading. New Heights provides students with access to good models of fluent reading with supported books, along with opportunities to practice reading fluently, both independently and in a conference situation. Research into the effectiveness of Rainbow Reading documents an increase in fluency of students who have participated in the program.

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is important to provide students with instruction and practice in fluency as they read connected text.” 	“Put Reading First”, p.23	New Heights provides an extensive range of authentic text which have been carefully selected and are supported by recordings free from distracting noises, providing a strong model of fluent reading.	<p>ALL SUPPORTED BOOKS</p> <p>Overview Chart, all teachers’ guides, p. 49</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Repeated reading and other guided oral reading procedures have clearly been shown to improve fluency and overall reading achievement.” • “The panel concluded that guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels.” • “The analysis of guided oral reading procedures led to the conclusion that such procedures had a consistent and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.” 	<p>“National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p.3–28</p> <p>“National Reading Panel Report: Summary”, p. 12</p> <p>“National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 3–3</p>	<p>A key factor in the New Heights methodology is repeated reading of a familiar text at an instructional level. Repeated practice of the text is important for orchestration and consolidation of skills, resulting in higher levels of accuracy and fluency.</p> <p>The structure of the New Heights program provides for teacher/tutor and student to conference regularly, for orientation to the book, for assessment of fluency and comprehension and for promotion and next step teaching. During the conferences, positive, specific feedback is given.</p> <p>New Heights encourage the students to practice reading the book while listening to the audiotape as many times as are needed, then practice reading the</p>	<p>Reading Practice, all teachers’ guides p. 16</p> <p>Conferencing guidelines, all teachers’ guides, p. 15-17</p> <p>Using the New Heights Program,</p>

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Example
		book independently either silently or aloud.	all teachers guides, p. 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) undertook a meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of repeated and assisted reading in improving students' reading fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000). They found clear differences in favor of assisted reading in improving oral reading and comprehension. 	<p>Kuhn, M. & Stahl, S. (2000). <i>Fluency: A Review of Developmental and Remedial Practices</i>.</p>	<p>Every New Heights student title is supported by an audiotape which provides students with valuable, self-controlled access to a fluent model, that is read at a suitable speed to allow them to follow the text.</p> <p>The use of an audiotape motivates and supports struggling readers in a supportive, private and non-threatening situation.</p>	<p>ALL SUPPORTED BOOKS</p> <p>Audiotapes, all teachers' guides, p.9</p>

- **Vocabulary Instruction**

“Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. ... Vocabulary is very important to reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean.” *Put Reading First*, p. 34.

The New Heights student titles provide controlled access to an increasing range of vocabulary. New Heights Teachers’ Guides provide Orientation and Conferencing plans which identify specialized vocabulary for teachers and tutors enabling them to support struggling readers and facilitate understanding of the text. Meaningful, text-related activities reinforce new vocabulary learned.

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Teaching specific words before reading helps both vocabulary learning and reading comprehension.” 	“Put Reading First”, p. 36	Every New Heights lesson plan includes an orientation to the text. The orientation familiarizes students with new vocabulary in the text, therefore aiding fluency and comprehension.	Bicycles Then, Bicycles Now OCP. Set 2, p.66
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word learning strategies include how to use context clues to determine word meanings. • “Because students learn most word meanings indirectly, or from context, it is important that they learn to use context clues effectively.” • “Competent reading requires skills that extend beyond the single-word level to contextual reading, and this skill can best be acquired by practicing reading in which the words are in a meaningful context.” 	“Put Reading First”, p. 37 “Put Reading First”, p. 40 “National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 3–11	New Heights student titles are rich in content and vocabulary. New or challenging vocabulary is carefully integrated into the story context, encouraging students to use context clues to gain meaning from the text. New Heights orientation and conferencing plans support the teaching of vocabulary. New Heights word search activities require the student to locate words that have been hidden, providing practice in recognizing words in a different context and spelling.	All Aboard OCP. Set 5, p. 34 All Aboard Word Search, Set 5, p.57

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is both a theoretical and an empirical fact that not all vocabulary can or must be learned through formal instruction and that vocabulary words can also be learned through incidental and indirect ways.” • “A comprehensive analysis of the collective research studies suggest that a variety of direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction can be effective. Effective instructional methods emphasize multimedia aspects of learning, richness of context in which words are to be learned, active student participation, and the number of exposures to words that learners will receive.” 	<p>Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Leung, 1992; Senechal & Cornell, 1993; Nicholson & White, 1992; Stewart et al., 1997 cited in “National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 4–26.</p> <p>“National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 4–27.</p>	<p>New Heights supports both explicit teaching of vocabulary development and incidental learning and teaching, dependent on students’ needs.</p> <p>Orientation and conferencing plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain specialized vocabulary • introduce unfamiliar vocabulary in a context in a one-to one situation • suggest a more detailed orientation to support English Language learners 	<p>Picasso OCP. Set 4, p.138</p>

- **Comprehension Instruction**

“Comprehension is defined as “intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader” (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Thus, readers derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional, problem solving thinking processes.” (Report of the National Reading Panel, Summary, p. 14

The New Heights program aims to build comprehension through audio-assisted reading. Extra learning opportunities are outlined which extend the text and meaningful activities are provided for every title to provide extra practice and require students to return to the text, recall information and draw conclusions. New Heights Orientation and Conferencing plans for all titles provide comprehension questions and discussion starters, at both a literal and inferential level.

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Comprehension is critically important to the development of children’s reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education.” • “Teachers not only must have a firm grasp of the content presented in text but also must have substantial knowledge of the strategies themselves, of which strategies are most effective for different students and types of content and of how best to teach and model strategy use.” • “The best way to pursue meaning is through conscious, controlled use of strategies.” 	<p>“National Reading Panel Report: Summary”, p. 13</p> <p>“National Reading Panel Report: Summary”, p. 15–16</p>	<p>New Heights identifies learning opportunities that support the comprehension of the text. Comprehension-focused learning opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retelling the story from another character’s point of view • creating a flow chart to retell the information in the text • identifying cause and effect • making personal connections • writing alternate endings to the story 	<p>Zapping Aliens writing activity, Set 3, p. 173</p> <p>Follow the Flow writing activity, Set 5, p. 107</p> <p>Car Trouble writing activity, Set 1, p. 71</p> <p>That’s a Good Question OCP Introduction, Set 2</p> <p>Old Friends, New Friends writing activity, Set 5, p. 137</p>

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Having peers instruct or interact over the use of reading strategies leads to an increase in the learning of the strategies, promotes intellectual discussion, and increases reading comprehension. This procedure saves on teacher time and gives the students more control over their learning and social interaction with peers.” 	<p>Duffy (1993) p. 223 cited “National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”.</p> <p>National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 4-45.</p>	<p>New Heights require interaction with meaningful text. These activities extend and enrich the skills learned during reading.</p> <p>Cloze activities have been provided for every title to improve and assess student comprehension. Use of cloze encourages the student to use meaning and structure cues, along with context cues, when reading.</p> <p>Text sequencing activities for every title provide a powerful means of developing and checking comprehension. and reading for meaning.</p> <p>A board game accompanying each title may be played with another student is provided for every title, designed to reinforce the skills learned while reading the text and consolidate comprehension of the text. It also gives valuable practice in reading, comprehending and following instructions.</p> <p>Writing activities are provided for all titles that are directly related to the student titles and encourage the student to think about what they have read and comprehend and interpret the text. Writing activities extend the text and reinforce both reading and writing skills.</p>	<p>Sea Horses cloze, Set 5, p. 157</p> <p>Unexplained Mysteries cloze, Set 5, p. 171</p> <p>Fly Ball board game, Set 3, p.88</p> <p>The Blue Whale writing activity, Set 4, p. 83</p>

Research	Source	New Heights	Supporting Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following forms of comprehension instruction were amongst those found to be the most effective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question answering – readers improve answering questions Question generating – readers learn to generate and answer inferential questions Summarization – readers improve memory and identification of main ideas. “In general, the evidence suggests that teaching a combination of reading comprehension techniques is the most effective. When students use them appropriately, they assist in recall, question answering, question generation, and summarization of texts. When used in combination, these techniques can improve results in standardized comprehension tests.” 	<p>“National Reading Panel Report: Reports of the Subgroups”, p. 4-44</p> <p>“National Reading Panel Report: Summary”, p. 15</p>	<p>Every New Heights Orientation and Conferencing plan supports the teacher with comprehension questions about the book at both a literal and inferential level. Conference guidelines encourage discussion of aspects of the story, along with retelling and direct questioning of the student in a supportive, positive and meaningful situation.</p> <p>Cloze activities provided in the teachers guide may be used for assessment purposes. This form of assessment is useful for assessing the student’s comprehension and diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in using different cues when reading.</p>	<p>All Aboard OCP, Set 5, p.54</p> <p>Assessment Using Cloze Activities, all teachers’ guides, p. 31</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The data suggest that text comprehension is enhanced when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their knowledge and experiences and construct mental representation in memory.” “Good readers draw on prior knowledge and experience to help them understand what they are reading. You can help your students make use of their prior knowledge to improve their comprehension.” 	<p>“National Reading Panel Report: Summary”, p. 14</p> <p>“Put Reading First”, p. 55</p>	<p>A key factor in student success is capitalizing on interest and prior knowledge. Teachers use their knowledge of students and the books to encourage student to choose a book which interest them. The New Heights teachers’ guide supports this process.</p> <p>Every New Heights Orientation and Conferencing Plan provides guidelines for orienting the student to the book, which is an extremely effective means of activating prior knowledge, fostering interest, and facilitating an understanding of the reading.</p>	<p>How to Implement the New Heights Program, all teachers’ guides, p. 13</p> <p>New Clothes OCP, Set 2, p. 14</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Research shows that teacher 	<p>“Put Reading First”, p. 51</p>	<p>Every New Heights Orientation and Conferencing</p>	<p>High Slide OCP, Set 1, p. 84</p>

questioning strongly supports and advances students' learning from reading."		plan provides explicit questions for a teacher or tutor, in such a way that the students will be answering questions at different levels.	
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- **Motivation**

The New Heights program has been carefully crafted to engage, motivate and support struggling readers. Each set contains 20 high-interest, supported titles at a similar difficulty level. The books have a higher interest level than text difficulty, so that they are of interest to older, reluctant readers. A wide range of topics and genres are included, with a balance of full-color fiction and nonfiction to ensure that all students will be able to choose a book that interests them. Short texts, supported by audiotapes, give students regular, successful reading experiences, which builds confidence and self-esteem.

References

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