Abstract

Four myths that underlie persistent, but ineffective, practices in early literacy education are analyzed in this article. Such analysis is essential because literacy disadvantage ultimately is an issue of equity—a matter of social justice. Research shows that these practices can be refuted and that optimal early literacy outcomes are possible for all students when parents, teachers, and school administrators serve as agents of equity.

Learning to read early and well is good for students, good for schools, and good for society. Students who learn to read during the primary grades use reading to learn in third grade and beyond. Schools that teach students to read early and well foster academic success and student engagement. Societies with strong support for early literacy development set the foundation for an educated citizenry that can participate in the cultural, economic, and civic life of the nation.

Literacy is both an educational and social issue that affects individuals and communities. Literacy underachievement reflects inequitable opportunity and results in unequal outcomes among socioeconomic and ethnic groups and between the sexes. The logical assumption, therefore, is that a society espousing equity and social justice would strive to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn to read early and well.

Most children learn to read during the first years of school. School is the societal institution that convenes each cohort of children at a mandated time. In kindergarten and the primary grades, children are exposed to a period of common instruction, evaluated in relation to a peer group, and expected to acquire literacy fundamentals. Inequitable opportunities become readily apparent during the preschool years, influencing both the transition to school and the progress of early literacy development.
To combat these inequities, schools and school districts must implement enlightened and well-resourced policies to guide practices affecting early literacy learning. Timing is crucial because literacy learning trajectories are established early in the school career. Early deficits are cumulative and, without intervention, are remarkably resistant to change (Juel 1988; Entwistle and Alexander 1999; Fransoo et al. 2005). Given the primacy of literacy and its strong association with ultimate educational outcomes, coherent policies should govern all aspects of early schooling, particularly as they affect literacy outcomes. Policies and practices should be based on informed professional judgment derived from the best available evidence of what works, when it works, and for whom it works. Unfortunately, educational practices are shaped by multiple forces and, all too often, are influenced less by empirical evidence than by prevailing sociopolitical mores and the deeply held beliefs of educators and educational communities.

The result is a plethora of practices that persist even though their effectiveness remains unproven. These practices are widely adhered to because educators believe they confer benefits—a belief that, although false, resonates with the idiosyncratic experiences or value systems of influential individuals. In other words, these persistent ineffectual practices assume the status of myth, acquire credibility, and rarely are critically examined. These myths emanate from many sources, including what Snow (2001) referred to as the power of popular knowledge: Everyone has been to school and assumes expertise on what should happen there, and every teacher knows at least one child that fared well in response to a specific educational program or practice and feels that similar benefits will accrue to all students.

Parents and educators’ beliefs shape teaching practices; and when these practices are guided by mythic misconceptions, futures are jeopardized, and inequalities become entrenched. Given the individual and societal import of early literacy education, unproven practices should play no role in pedagogy. Educators must be guided by research-validated practices and a sense of urgency. The optimal time frame for literacy learning is the first few years of school. Children who do not learn to read well during those years are unlikely ever to read fluently (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998; Moats 1999; Lyon et al. 2001).

In this article, four educational myths that constitute a self-sustaining, but unproven, belief system are critically analyzed. These myths underlie ineffectual practices that have a negative impact on students’ early literacy development and, ultimately, on societal aspirations to be more inclusive and equitable. The rationale underlying each myth is discussed, and informed opinion and research evidence to dispel these claims are offered. As an alternative, a series of practices recommended by experts and supported by research is offered to help parents, teachers, and school administrators serve as agents of...
equity and ensure optimal early literacy outcomes for all students.

Educational Myths

Educational myths are a testament to the power of popular knowledge and an impediment to effective practice. This article includes discussion and response to four educational myths that stymie social justice by setting limits on early literacy achievement:

- Literacy learning trajectories are not alterable—age five is too late to make changes;
- Retention is the answer—another year is necessary to master the fundamentals;
- Early identification stigmatizes students—we must wait to make sure; and
- Efforts are futile—schools can only do so much.

Myth #1: Literacy Learning Trajectories Are Not Alterable

Proponents of this myth point out the wide variation in language exposure and interaction that children experience during the preschool years. They maintain that preschool language legacies set not only the foundation for early literacy learning, but also the limits of that learning. They often cite research evidence to support their claims; for example, children from supportive backgrounds and print-rich environments come to school with a 1,000-hour advantage (Cunningham and Allington 1994), arrive with stronger school readiness skills, and enjoy a more successful transition to school than do their disadvantaged peers (McCain and Mustard 2002). Conversely, children who enter school with weak literacy backgrounds lack the skills necessary to benefit from formal reading instruction and have a more difficult time learning to read in school (Hammill and McNutt 1980; Scarborough 1998).

From those arguments, proponents of this myth maintain that literacy trajectories are predetermined and that children already are oriented toward success or failure at the time of school entry. They point to neurobiological research which suggests that rapid brain development during the early years is shaped by the environment and that “experience-based brain development affects learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health throughout life” (McCain and Mustard 2002, 11). They contend that brain development is optimized in nurturing and well-resourced homes with loving caregivers who use positive parenting practices and in safe, supportive communities. These fortunate children enter school with greater cognitive maturity and higher readiness skills, and they likely enjoy a far greater level of parental support during the school years (Ho and Willms 1996). These children start out ahead; and the longer they stay in school, the wider the gap becomes (Entwistle and Alexander 1999).

Response. Disadvantaged children are more likely to enter school with deficits in language and school readiness skills and often have cognitive and behavioral difficulties that impede school learning (Willms 2002). Underprivileged children experience reduced
opportunities to learn during the preschool years and enter school at a disadvantage. The authors are not prepared to accept, however, that at five years of age, these children’s fates are sealed. This perspective is deterministic in the extreme. Although this viewpoint recognizes the importance of the preschool years, it does not account for the ongoing neurobiological development that occurs during the elementary grades or the role schools can play in enriching the experiences and opportunities of disadvantaged children.

Children’s early years’ experiences should be viewed as one of the determinants of the “range of potential” that children possess when they enter school. Although the size of this range and the extent to which subsequent family, school, and community experiences influence a child’s learning trajectory are unknown, research suggests that 20 to 45 percent of children have difficulty learning to read at school (Invernizzi 2002; Jamieson and Tremblay 2005). Not all of those children, however, come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Reading difficulties occur across all socioeconomic strata, and the majority of children who struggle with reading come from middle class homes (Snow et al. 1998; Willms 2002). Moreover, converging evidence has suggested that literacy learning trajectories are alterable and that children who encounter reading difficulty can be identified in kindergarten or even earlier (Torgesen 1997; Snow et al. 1998).

Research also has provided compelling evidence that early identification and intervention can prevent most reading difficulties, and that remediation after failure occurs is a more onerous, time-consuming, and expensive task than preventing these difficulties from occurring in the first place (Torgesen 1997; Dickson and Bursuck 1999). Early identification and targeted intervention during the first few years of school can ameliorate literacy disadvantage. Given the high proportion of young students who experience literacy learning difficulties and the research evidence supporting early intervention, practices based on the myth that age five is too late are uninformed and professionally irresponsible.

**Myth #2: Retention Is the Answer**

Retention is the practice of requiring children to repeat a grade when they have not demonstrated sufficient mastery of the curricular objectives for that grade. This common practice assumes that all children have the ability to master grade-level curricular objectives and all that is required is more time on task (Beebe-Frankenberger et al. 2004). This myth is rooted in the philosophical perspective that early reading problems reflect immaturity and that biological maturation will enhance literacy development. Many teachers use failure to read at grade level to justify early retention (Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis 2004), rationalizing that “the gift of time” will enhance maturity that, in turn, will facilitate mastery of literacy skills prerequisite for success at the next grade level.

Some teachers who retain struggling readers may know that research does not support retention as an effective intervention for children with reading difficulties (Snow et al. 1998). However, in making retention recommendations, teachers tend to rely on their own experience and that of their colleagues (Witmer et al. 2004). They argue that each child needs to be considered individually, and that professional teacher judgment
is required to decide whether a child should be retained. They cite stories of previously retained primary students who did better the second time around and claim success when test performance improves during the second year working with the same curriculum.

**Response.** Although the biological maturation perspective frequently is used to justify early grade retention and is part of the common wisdom of educators and policy makers, Meisels (1999) suggested that retention affords a simplistic solution to a complex problem—a solution that in reality only exacerbates existing problems. Snow (2001) viewed early grade retention as a practice that emanates from educators’ belief systems—a practice that continues because teachers think repeating a grade serves students’ best interests and is less socially damaging than later grade retention.

When teachers base their practice on beliefs, they either ignore or are unaware of research findings regarding the negative ramifications of early grade retention. Research evidence on the effectiveness of early grade retention is both abundant and overwhelmingly negative. For example, Snow et al. (1998) found that forcing a child to repeat the same curriculum is specially pernicious in light of the central role of phonological deficiency in reading difficulties, and that retention without specialist intervention is ineffective in remediating these difficulties. Thus, the persistence of reading difficulties during and after the retained year provides stark testimony to the inadequacy of the maturational perspective (Shaywitz 2003). Recent research demonstrated that children who are retained in kindergarten perform less well on measures of literacy and numeracy than they would have performed had they been promoted to the next grade level with same-age peers (Hong and Raudenbush 2005).

Research refutes popular beliefs about early grade retention and demonstrates that retention in kindergarten or first grade does not produce enduring academic gains (Shepard and Smith 1986; Jimerson 1999; Owings and Kaplan 2001; Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple 2002; Jimerson and Kauffman 2003; Beebe-Frankenberger et al. 2004; Hong and Raudenbush 2005). Although retained students may appear more competent during the retained year, these improvements are ephemeral. They quickly dissipate beyond that grade level (Jimerson 1999), and the small advantages obtained by a few retained first-graders wash out by third grade (Shepard 1989; McCollum et al. 1999). In addition, early grade retention is a powerful predictor of school disengagement and of later school dropout (McCollum et al. 1999; Jimerson 2001; Jimerson and Kauffman 2003).

Findings on early grade retention are consistent with the larger body of research on retention, which has overwhelmingly demonstrated that retention is an ineffective, expensive, and often counterproductive intervention for students who do not achieve curricular objectives during their first year in a grade (McCollum et al. 1999; Jimerson 2001; Owings and Kaplan 2001; Jimerson and Kauffman 2003; Beebe-Frankenberger et al. 2004; Kenneady 2004).

**Myth 3: Early Identification Stigmatizes Students**

Proponents of this argument maintain that providing extra support to boost early literacy learning will unnecessarily stigmatize young children, harm their self-esteem, and reduce their motivation to learn. They cite the negative social-emotional consequences of
labeling young children as being at risk for academic failure. Some also cite the biological maturation hypothesis that is used to support early grade retention. Others adopt an orthodox perspective on inclusive education and view targeted support not as augmentation of the regular literacy curriculum, but as exclusion from the mainstream. The stigmatization myth supports and is supported by categorical approaches to identifying learning difficulties that require students to fit into a service category based on predetermined criteria, such as a discrepancy between aptitude and achievement on designated standardized measures. This criterion traditionally has been used to determine eligibility for remedial programs by establishing a reading deficit based on reading performance relative to a student’s cognitive ability on a standardized measure of intelligence (Shaywitz 2003).

Response. The premise that provision of extra help in the early grades will result in loss of self-esteem assumes that children do not feel stigmatized and ostracized when they cannot read like other children and cannot keep pace with classmates. Children know all too well when their reading skills are weak—they engage in ongoing peer evaluation and in self-evaluation in relation to peers. The use of leveled texts does not preclude students from comparing their progress to that of classmates. In fact, those texts make comparison easier because text complexity is succinctly summarized in the number or letter on books available to the child.

Proponents of the stigmatization myth essentially view differentiation of early literacy instruction not as a professional response to identified needs, but as a negative practice that labels students and unnecessarily draws attention to them. They are mistaken. In a preventive early intervention approach, intervention is non-categorical, no label is assigned, and support is available to all students regardless of the reasons for their reading difficulties.

The preventive approach is premised on research findings which showed that:

• young children with literacy learning difficulties present different skill profiles than those with good reading potential (Schatschneider et al. 2004);
• they can be identified in kindergarten (O’Malley et al. 2002); and
• although their instructional needs may differ quantitatively in terms of the duration and intensity of intervention (Berninger et al. 2002; O’Malley et al. 2002; Shaywitz 2003), the type of intervention required does not differ substantively among subgroups of kindergarten children at risk for reading difficulties (Lyon et al. 2001).

Thus, the preventive approach is non-categorical—it does not label students, and it provides extra support for all students whose reading levels are low relative to their classmates or relative to their own aptitude (Torgeson 2000; Lyon et al. 2001).

By preventing most reading difficulties, early intervention actually facilitates inclusion. When at-risk children receive the support necessary to develop literacy skills early in their school career, they close the gap with more advantaged peers. They then engage in successful encounters with print from an early age and experience increased literacy and language growth, all of which enables them to stay on track in the development of
subsequent literacy skills (Share and Stanovich 1995). By preventing literacy failure, early intervention ensures that stigmatization does not occur; rather, it enhances academic success, boosts self-esteem, and allows students to participate fully in the curricular and social life of school (Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins 1995; Rafoth 1997).

Conversely, waiting to determine whether students have significant reading difficulty essentially means waiting for them to fail, and that typically means they fail repeatedly before identification and intervention occur. The wait-to-fail paradigm can no longer be tolerated. Early identification of learning needs and the timely provision of targeted intervention are crucial because delaying intervention results in repeated failure, which has documented negative effects in both the academic-cognitive and social-behavioral domains. Lyon et al. (2001, 277) suggested that “the costs of delaying intervention are too great to wait.” In consort with other experts (Snow et al. 1998; Denton, Vaughn, and Fletcher 2003; Shaywitz 2003; Justice and Scheule 2004), Lyon and his fellow researchers strongly recommended that help be provided to children with reading difficulties before they fail because intervention yields the best results when given in kindergarten or first grade.

A practice that sustains the wait-to-fail paradigm is the requirement that an IQ-achievement discrepancy criterion be established to identify young students with reading disabilities. This is a harmful practice that is not supported by science. Research (Shaywitz 2003; Stage et al. 2003) suggested that the presence of an IQ-achievement discrepancy is not, by itself, a definitive indicator of a reading disability or the most relevant predictor of responsiveness to intervention. Literacy researchers recommend that such formulas be discarded because they are statistically flawed, yield results that are not stable over time, and do not reliably discriminate among subtypes of poor readers (Fletcher et al. 1994; Lyon et al. 2001; O’Malley et al. 2002). Further, determining eligibility based on service categories, such as an IQ-achievement discrepancy, mitigates early identification because of the difficulty in establishing the required magnitude of discrepancy in young students who only recently have been exposed to instruction. Consequently, children are forced to fail repeatedly until their discrepancy reaches an arbitrary size. As a result, intervention is postponed for several years and often does not occur until third grade, when sustained failure has pummeled self-esteem and difficulties pervade both the cognitive-academic and social-behavioral domains. Moreover, intervention provided in the second or third grade is really too little, too late (Lyon et al. 2001; Stage et al. 2003).

Delaying identification and intervention magnifies literacy learning difficulties. Research shows that waiting to make sure is ultimately far more harmful to students’
Myth 4: Efforts Are Futile

This myth acknowledges that students’ readiness to learn at school and their literacy trajectories are influenced by numerous factors—many of which are beyond the control of schools. Proponents argue that schools cannot reverse developmental delays or undo cases of severe deprivation. They believe that schools are not capable of overcoming the effects of inequitable preschool opportunities or inadequate family environments. They argue that the roots of inequity run deep; that these roots influence all aspects of development during the preschool years and do not disappear when students go to school.

The landmark *Equality of Educational Opportunity* Study (Coleman 1966) suggested that schools had relatively little impact on children’s schooling outcomes over and above the effects of parents’ family background. The popular notion that schools do not make a difference has persisted, supporting the myth that efforts on the part of schools are futile.

Response. The authors agree that preschool years are important to all aspects of development and that children go to school with heterogeneous strengths and needs resulting from the interaction of genetic endowment and early childhood opportunities. Schools cannot easily affect parenting practices or neighborhood environments.

Since the Coleman (1966) report, however, numerous studies (Murnane 1981; Rutter 1983; McPherson and Willms 1987; Scheerens 1992; Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore 1995) have shown that schooling outcomes do vary considerably, even when students’ family backgrounds are considered. Two important factors related to students’ learning trajectories are the effective use of class time and teaching that is structured and adaptive (Scheerens 1992; Slavin 1994). Researchers also have been able to identify specific aspects of school climate that result in better schooling outcomes such as positive interactions among students and teachers, active parental involvement, high expectations for achievement, consistent and supportive disciplinary practices, and an effective use of time and resources (Anderson 1985; Gamoran 1986, 1987; Pallas 1988; Slavin 1990; Plewis 1991; Ho and Willms 1996; Mosenthal et al. 2004).

Based on their experience as educators and educational researchers, the authors suggest that schools, as publicly funded and universally accessible societal institutions, must be ready to address the diverse needs children bring with them to the school setting (Crnic and Lamberty 1994; May and Kundert 1997). Parents and educators must adopt a stance that school reform is possible and that efforts are not futile (Fullan 2003). Although easier said than done, believing that efforts are futile is unconscionable. This perspective further penalizes vulnerable children for whom life already has been punitive, effectively forfeiting their future at age five.

The myth that efforts are futile is most damaging to those who are the most disadvantaged. Although children with reading difficulties come from all socioeconomic
strata, children from minority groups and those living in poverty are disproportionately represented in the 40 percent of fourth graders who struggle with reading (Jamieson and Tremblay 2005).

Unfortunately, many disadvantaged children present similar stories. They did not enjoy stimulating, print-rich preschool experiences, and they entered school with weaker skills than their more advantaged peers. Teachers perceived them as less capable and held lower expectations for them. Reduced expectations and negative perceptions by teachers adversely influenced the perceptions of other students, increased the likelihood of peer rejection, and contributed to reduced classroom participation, which resulted in lower academic achievement and was exacerbated by literacy learning difficulties (Montague and Rinaldi 2001). The cycle of disadvantage that began at birth and continued during the preschool period perpetuates during the early elementary years, becomes deeply entrenched when they do not learn to read, and spirals ever downward when they enter fourth grade and cannot read to learn.

This negative cycle is influenced by teacher perceptions of students’ competency, which are not necessarily based on literacy proficiency. Research (Hallahan and Kauffman 2003; Shaywitz 2003; Beswick, Willms, and Sloat 2005) suggested that teacher ratings of literacy achievement are affected by gender and behavior, as well as by factors such as maternal education, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Believing that efforts are futile could deny or limit opportunities for particular subgroups of students—many of whom already are vulnerable when they enter school. Moreover, demographic variables over which students have no control could influence their access to needed services.

Setting aside issues of bias and misperception, other reasons exist as to why the notion that efforts are futile cannot be condoned. First, the moderate-to-small effect sizes found for early predictive studies are an indication that, at the time of school entry, child development still is open to intervention (LaParo and Pianta 2000). Second, research supports the positive effects of early intervention using individualized and small-group instruction for young children with reading difficulties (Lyon et al. 2001; O’Malley et al. 2002; Vadasy et al. 2002). Third, evidence shows that preventive early intervention for reading difficulties is more effective than remedial programs and can reduce the number of children classified as poor readers by approximately 70 percent (Lyon et al. 2001). Last, research (Berninger et al. 2001) showed that for most young students, the support provided in the preventive early intervention approach is all that is needed to allow students to compensate for developmental or experiential gaps and to make reading progress at the expected rate.

Believing that efforts are futile is unconscionable. This perspective further penalizes vulnerable children for whom life already has been punitive, effectively forfeiting their future at age five.
Proceeding on the premise that “schools can only do so much” is risky and irresponsible. By adhering to this belief, the struggles of vulnerable children, for whom an inclusive educational system is designed to support, are exacerbated. Excuses for low expectations effectively perpetuate the status quo, stymie equity, and should not be accepted. Such a premise is deterministic and prejudicial; it lacks hope and denies opportunity to those who need it most.

The Way Forward

Dispelling myths requires more than just research and critical examination. New policies and practices that lead to successful outcomes for children are required. Success stories based on sound policy and practice can contradict popular beliefs and influence parents and educators to do things in different ways. Three critical systemic elements are essential:

• an early warning system with continuous monitoring;
• a preventive framework with effective interventions; and
• support of inclusive practices, including a no-fail policy.

In many jurisdictions, the first assessments of children’s cognitive development do not occur until school entry and, in some cases, not until the end of the second or third grade. However, tools are available to assess children’s learning, behavioral, and health outcomes much earlier, certainly as early as age three or even earlier (Willms 2002). The development of a strong early warning system that identifies children who are likely to require extra resources to enable them to succeed in their literacy development is essential. This system requires that we overcome the preschool versus formal school-entry barrier, and consider ages three through seven as the critical period for children to learn to read and acquire the skills for reading to learn. The early monitoring system should comprise a series of short, but reliable and valid, assessments of learning, behavioral, and health outcomes, so that every child’s progress is continuously monitored.

The assessment of early childhood outcomes never is totally reliable, and one can challenge the predictive validity of assessments done at age three or four. A number of false-positives—children who are considered vulnerable and in need of extra resources, when in fact they are late bloomers who later acquire adequate literacy skills without any intervention—always exist. False-negatives—children who do reasonably well on an assessment, when in fact they fall off track later and require extra support—also occur. The prevalence of false-positives often becomes a resource issue decision: Is it better to give some children a boost when perhaps they do not need one than to have a much larger number of children fail? The presence of false-negatives is a greater concern and underlies the need for continuous monitoring rather than one-shot assessments. With objective and reliable data collected at regular intervals, children can be identified as requiring extra support if and when they fall off track. Costs also can be reduced because children who benefit from timely intervention need less potent and sustained support once they are on track. Another benefit of continuous monitoring is that it provides an evidence base for the efficacy of interventions.
The second critical element is a set of interventions for children who fall behind in their literacy skill development. The framework recommended by the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties (Snow et al. 1998) has three tiers:

- the provision of excellent classroom instruction for all children;
- the proactive allocation of supplementary resources and enhanced learning opportunities for children who are likely to encounter reading difficulties because of demographic or skill-specific factors; and
- the provision of multitiered intensive interventions for children whose mastery of literacy fundamentals is significantly below normative expectations. The cutoff points for tier 2 and 3 interventions are likely to vary among schools and districts, but experience suggests that tier 3 interventions are likely for the bottom 20 percent of students, and tier 2 interventions are more common for students in the 20th to 40th percentiles.

Last, well-resourced policies and practices that are inclusive of all students are needed. For example, policies that stream children early into high- and low-ability groups tend to slow progress for low-ability students without advancing the pace of high-ability students (Dreeben and Gamoran 1986; Gamoran 1986). A district no-fail policy should be inclusive so that students are not segregated from their same-age peers. By rejecting retention as an intervention for academic difficulties, districts will be compelled to provide the resources necessary to support a system of school-based monitoring and multitiered intervention for those who encounter learning difficulties.

**Concluding Comments**

Schools have the dual responsibility of transmitting cultural knowledge and values while simultaneously preparing the next generation of citizens (Ungerleider 2003). Teaching children to read early and well is the fundamental challenge schools must meet if they aspire to address those broad societal goals. When schools meet this challenge, they serve students as well as the larger society by equipping students with the requisite skills for future success. They produce the educated citizenry critical in a democratic and highly technological society, and they reduce societal inequity. However, when large numbers of students graduate with low literacy achievement, schools do not fulfill these broad societal goals. Rather, they fail individual students, they fail the larger society, and they perpetuate social injustice (Ungerleider 2003).

As educational practitioners and researchers, the authors know that educational policy traditionally has been influenced by the beliefs of parents and educators, as well as by prevailing political ecologies. However, educational decision makers must move away from ideologically driven disputes and rely on coherent, empirically based approaches. Levin (2003) suggested that such progress requires a confluence of factors: a defined problem, an intersection of sociopolitical events, and the availability of possible solutions. The results of regional, national, and international assessments have clearly defined the problem: Too many children are not learning to read early and well and, as a result, experience restricted educational, economic, cultural, and civic opportunities both during and beyond the school years. The sociopolitical context also is ripe for change. We live in an era of accountability and in a society in which shifting demographics make it crucial that the next generation be well-educated and highly literate.
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Solutions are at hand. Prolific research over the past 20 years has clearly demonstrated the fallacy of some closely held educational myths. For example, we now know that:

- literacy-learning trajectories can be changed;
- retention is not an effective intervention for reading difficulties; and
- excellent classroom instruction augmented by early identification and intervention can prevent most reading difficulties.

Institutional inertia is particularly strong when there is a lot at stake. For each student and for society as a whole, early literacy improvement is a high-stakes endeavor. By ensuring optimal literacy outcomes during the primary grades, schools serve individual students and the larger society. They become agents of equity rather than perpetuators of the status quo. Thus, educators and policy makers must be clear in their commitments, coherent in their policies, and constant in their purpose. They must know the research, discern the implications for practice, convince their communities to abandon unproven practices, and implement policies that offer all students the excellent literacy instruction and augmentative support they need to learn to read early and well.

References


**Beswick, Sloat, and Willms**


Joan F. Beswick is a career educator who has worked in schools for more than 30 years as a teacher, consultant, and administrator. Her areas of expertise and research interest are readiness to learn at school, language and literacy development, and preventive early intervention.

Elizabeth A. Sloat conducts research on reading and writing acquisition and is interested in outcomes-based evaluation models to assess program effects longitudinally. She currently is working with schools to evaluate a monitoring system aimed at tracking literacy growth trajectories from kindergarten to second grade.

J. Douglas Willms is editor of *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada’s National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. He has published nearly 200 research articles and monographs pertaining to youth literacy, children’s health, school system accountability, and assessment of national reforms.