What the Reading Wars Fail to Address

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Report after report describes a reading crisis and frequently reported statistics point out that 67% of fourth graders read below grade level and nearly 130 million American adults read below the sixth-grade level. The reading wars have focused mainly on learning to read, and although this focus presents an obviously a very important challenge, studies about *wanting and liking* to read has been largely ignored. This brief article will describe a study conducted at the University of Connecticut entitled the Schoolwide Enrichment Model–Reading (Reis, et al. 2004 & Reis, et al. 2011) that calls attention to getting young people interested in and engaged in meaningful reading activities.

Summary of SEM-R
[The several citations that follow can be found in the references at the end of this article.]

The SEM-R applies a widely used enrichment program, the SEM, to reading. The three-phase structure of the SEM-R approach is derived from Renzulli's (1977) enrichment triad model (SEM), with three levels of enrichment: Type I (exposure), Type II (differentiated training in specific thinking and process skills), and Type III (investigations of self-selected topics). The SEM-R's three phases follow this learning approach, as Phase 1 focuses on exposing students to books, Phase 2 incorporates differentiated instruction, including specific reading strategy instruction, applied to self-selected independent reading, and Phase 3 allows students to pursue self-selected enrichment activities and projects related to reading.

The triad model, along with its larger-scale translation into the SEM (Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1985; 1997), is one of the most popular approaches in gifted education pedagogy (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007) and has also been used as a magnet and charter school theme with students in urban, suburban, and rural schools across the country for the past three decades (Reis & Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 1994). The SEM is widely used as an enrichment theme in both gifted and regular education programs, with this broad applicability of the SEM's three central goals: developing talents in all children, providing a broad range of differentiated learning experiences for all students, and providing follow-up advanced learning opportunities for children based on abilities and interests. The SEM emphasizes the use of engaging and challenging learning experiences constructed around students' interests, learning styles, and product styles. A good starting point for examining reading interests is to administer the Reading Interest-A-Lyzer which can be found at the following site: [https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/5vuggur57sm2bl2xik388/Reading-Interest-A-Lyzer.pdf?rlkey=m8dfh6eyora65tpwp68px16jr&dl=0]

Separate studies on the SEM have demonstrated its effectiveness in schools with widely differing socioeconomic levels and program organization patterns (Olenchak, 1988; Olenchak & Renzulli, 1989). The effectiveness of the model has been studied in more than 30 years of

research and field testing, most recently in the use of SEM as a curricular framework (Reis & Fogarty, 2006; Reis, Gentry, & Maxfield, 1998; Reis et al., 2005).

A major goal of the SEM is engagement of students in self-selected learning opportunities, representing another component that has been integrated into the SEM-R. Current research connects increased levels of student engagement to increased achievement in reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Teale & Gambrell, 2007), increased student motivation for reading (Gambrell et al., 1996), achievement goals (Meece & Miller, 1999), and interest (Guthrie et al., 2006). Guthrie's (2004) research suggests that engagement and enjoyment in reading may emerge when readers spend time reading and employ strategic cognitive behaviors that enable them to create meaning from text. A relationship has also been suggested between engagement and motivation as students who read more generally have higher motivation to read (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2006a; Guthrie et al., 2007) and may also have higher reading achievement (Reis et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 1990). Recommended instructional practices to increase reading motivation and comprehension from Guthrie and Wigfield's research are embedded in the SEM-R, such as supporting student autonomy (Phase 2 and 3), exposure to and having students read interesting texts (Phase 1 and 2), facilitating social interactions related to reading (all phases), and maintaining strong relations between teachers and students (all phases; Guthrie et al., 2006b).

A second theoretical influence on the SEM-R is differentiated instruction using assessment data to support modification of curriculum and instruction to respond to differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Renzulli, 1988; Tomlinson, 2001). Differentiated instruction emphasizes that learning is most effective when teachers are able to assess students' current levels of functioning and learning preferences and then use this information to help students progress to more advanced levels of functioning and a better match of learning opportunities. Differentiated instruction can be used to ensure that all students receive appropriate academic challenge as well as to promote engagement and higher achievement (e.g., Byrnes, 1996; Renzulli, 1977). Although differentiated instruction is widely discussed as a goal in schools across the country and continues to be a national focus in professional development efforts, little experimental research has been conducted on its use, and teachers appear to struggle to implement differentiated instruction, facing challenges such as concerns about planning for and managing differentiation as well as fear of state assessments and little administrative support (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006; Latz et al., 2009; Moon et al., 2003; Reis et al., 1993; Reis et al., 2004; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

Research Related to the SEM-R Intervention

The SEM-R intervention includes three phases. In Phase 1, the "exposure" phase, teachers presented short read-alouds from high-quality literature focusing on high levels of cognitive engagement (Guthrie et al., 2000; Knapp et al., 1995; Taylor et al., 2003) by selecting enjoyable "bookhooks" to introduce and expose students to a wide variety of titles, genres, authors, and topics (Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1997). As part of these oral shared read-alouds, teachers provided scaffolded instruction through modeling and discussion, focusing on demonstrating reading strategies and self-regulation skills, such as those advocated in a more recently recommended type of scaffolded silent reading (Reutzel et al., 1994; Reutzel et al.,

2008) and the use of higher order questions to guide discussion (Taylor et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2000). Across all phases of SEM-R, researchers have implemented the ideas of teaching reading for cognitive engagement as discussed by Taylor et al. (2003), Knapp et al. (1995), and Guthrie et al. (2000).

Phase 2 of the SEM-R model emphasizes the development of students' ability to engage in supported independent reading (SIR) of self-selected, appropriately challenging books, with differentiated instruction in conferences with the teacher or another adult. Controversy about this topic ensued after the NRP reported a lack of research support for silent reading and discussed the shortcomings of both the report and some of the research examined in the report (see, e.g., Allington, 2002; Cunningham, 2001; Krashen, 2002). Research supporting various uses of independent reading during reading class exists. Duke (2000) found that students need extended experiences with print of various genres for continuing academic achievement. Anderson et al. (1988), studying the relation between the amount of student reading completed outside of school and reading achievement, identified reading books as the best predictor of reading achievement. Taylor et al. (1990) studied elementary students who kept daily reading logs, noting that time spent reading in school contributed to growth in reading achievement. Recently, Reutzel et al. (2008) found that students who used silent, sustained reading did just as well as those who used guided repeated oral reading on fluency and comprehension. Krashen (2002) studied the use of silent reading accompanied by some instruction using children's books, finding achievement benefits for independent reading. Some of the criticism leveled at silent reading specifies the shortcomings that exist when teachers do not give instruction or feedback during the process (Stahl, 2004). Conferences, accompanied by differentiated instruction during Phase 2 independent reading, are a core component of SEM-R, as is an emphasis on appropriate challenge levels of the books selected by students. Phase 2 includes most of the general principles of effective reading instruction identified by Reutzel and Smith (2004), including modeling and scaffolding during conferences, time on task, volume of reading, student choice, discussion and dialogue, access to a variety of reading materials, encouragement of engaged reading, a print-rich environment, and silent reading practice. During Phase 2, students selected books from a classroom library given as part of the study (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005) that included high-quality, age-appropriate books (Teale & Gambrell, 2007) as well as high-interest and above-grade-level texts (Reis & Fogarty, 2006). Students were encouraged to select books that challenged them and were approximately one to two grade levels above their current independent reading levels, ensuring that they were of high interest and neither too easy nor too difficult (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Anderson et al., 1988, Reis & Renzulli, 1989). In the SEM-R, teachers monitored and evaluated book selection and assisted students in the selection of books of appropriate challenge during weekly conferences, as quantity and quality of book selections contribute to higher achievement (Topping et al., 2007). Another focus of book selection was related to nonfiction, as 30% to 40% of the classroom libraries across grade levels consisted of nonfiction books, shown to be effective in boosting comprehension, especially for boys (Topping et al., 2008). Students learned strategies for recognizing appropriate books and were coached to select challenging instructional-level books in areas of their interest to promote engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Over the course of the intervention, students initially read for 5 to 15 minutes a day during Phase 2; over time they extended SIR to 20 to 25 minutes and finally to 35 to 45 minutes each day.

During this in-class reading time, students participated in reading conferences with their teachers, receiving monitored and differentiated instruction (Bryan et al., 2003; Manning & Manning, 1984) during brief, individualized, instructional conferences. On average, each student participated in one to two conferences per week for a duration of about 5 minutes per conference. These conferences included time for positive interactions with students, a focus on differentiated student-centered instruction (Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Tomlinson, 2003), and supportive classroom interactions (Bryan et al., 2003; Manning & Manning, 1984; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). During student conferences, students read aloud brief sections of their books (Hiebert, 2006), and teachers consistently monitored and documented the instructional challenge match of each book read in Phase 2 while also encouraging and praising students for success in reading (Thompson, Ransdell, & Rousseau, 2005). In these conferences, classroom teachers and instructional aides provided individualized instruction in strategy use, including predicting, using inferences, and making connections through modeling and discussions (Bandura, 1986; Bryan, et al., 2003; Dowhower, 1987; Duffy, Roehler, & Herrmann, 1988; Rasinski, 1990; Stahl, 2004). Phase 3 of SEM-R is also based on research that avoids ineffective reading instruction (Flippo, 1998), focusing instead on effective reading instruction as identified by experts in reading (Allington, 2001; Anderson et al., 1988; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) as well as enrichment and engagement pedagogy (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Renzulli & Reis, 1985; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) to enable students to move from teacher-directed opportunities to self-choice activities over the course of the SEM-R study. Phase 3 activities included, but were not limited to, opportunities to explore new technology, discussion groups, practice with advanced questioning and thinking skills, creativity training in language arts (Renzulli et al., 2000), learning centers, Interest-based projects, buddy oral reading, and book discussions.

The following specific research questions guided the SEM-R research study:

1. Can the regular reading curriculum be replaced by an independent and interest-based program (SEM-R) without adversely affecting scores on standardized assessments of reading fluency and reading comprehension?
2. Can the use of the SEM-R increase students' reading fluency and comprehension?
3. Do teachers, principals, and literacy coaches of students who participate in the SEM-R intervention report higher levels of student engagement in reading?

Research Method

This study incorporated cluster-randomized assignment to groups, with 37 classrooms in the treatment condition and 33 in the control condition. The sample included students in second to fifth grades from five elementary schools across the United States. The schools were selected using criteria specified in the funding grant, with a focus on participation of schools in urban or rural settings with high percentages of students placed at risk because of poverty or other factors and the ability and willingness of school personnel to meet the methodological research requirements (e.g., random assignment to treatment or control condition for both teachers and students, integrated implementation of the treatment conditions, and timely administration of assessments). The SEM-R intervention for all five schools started within 2 weeks of the start of the fall academic school year and continued for 5 months, through the last 2 weeks of February. Pretest and posttest data were collected on students' reading fluency and comprehension, and the

quantitative procedures of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and multivariate analysis of variance were used to investigate the effects of the SEM-R intervention on these reading outcomes.

Sample

The SEM-R was implemented in five elementary schools, which were selected for participation in this study based on school size and demographics. Schools with at least three to preferably four classes per grade level across second to fifth grade were selected. The majority of classrooms were in third to fifth grade, but two second grade gifted classes reading at above grade level were also included. The number of participating teachers at each grade level for each school is summarized in Table 1. The total group of schools included rural, urban, and suburban locations across five states, and the student population at the five schools varied by race, ethnicity, and language as well as socioeconomic status (SES). In total, 1,192 students and 63 teachers participated in the study. Percentages of students within specific demographic groups at each school are summarized in Table 2. These tables can be found in the second reference below (school names are pseudonyms).

The teachers in the treatment and control conditions were similar in years of experience and highest degree attained (as reported on the preprogram Teaching and Reading: Attitudes and Practices Survey). Across the five schools, treatment group teachers had a mean of 13.8 years of experience ($SD = 8.90$) and control group teachers had a mean of 15.9 years of experience ($SD = 11.04$). Treatment teachers ranged from 3 to 33 years of experience, and control group teachers ranged from 1 to 37 years. Fourteen teachers from each group had achieved a bachelor's as their highest degree; 15 in the treatment group and 16 in the control group had achieved a master's degree. One teacher in the treatment group had achieved a 6th-year certificate.

An examination of years of experience between treatment group and control group teachers within schools showed that two of the schools had similar levels of experience between groups while the other three showed greater differences. In the Urban Magnet School, treatment teachers had a mean of 18.57 years of experience while control group teachers had a mean of 9.83 years. In both the Suburban South School and the Urban Southeast School, on the other hand, control group teachers had considerably more experience than treatment group teachers (25.67 years control, 11.63 years treatment in Suburban Southeast School, 12.50 years control, 6.67 years treatment in the Urban Southeast School).

References

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