

Evidence, Wisdom, and Older Struggling Readers: Taking the Long View  
Gay Ivey  
University of North Carolina-Greensboro ([mgivey@uncg.edu](mailto:mgivey@uncg.edu))

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**Key points for the session:**

- Planning interventions for older readers cannot and should not ignore the qualities of being an adolescent, the realities of being an adolescent today, nor the accumulated psychological/social hardships of year-after-year struggle with reading in school.
- Most standardized assessments do not provide specific information on what students know about reading words that you help you make an effective instructional plan.
- There is no evidence that we have even a moderate number of older students—even among those who struggle—who need phonics instruction. It is more likely the case that when students have difficulty reading words, it is with multisyllabic words and unfamiliar, irregularly spelled words. But there is little certainty that simply teaching students to read multisyllabic words and having them practice related strategies would make a meaningful difference in their reading.
- When it comes to becoming a proficient word reader, decoding words—whether monosyllabic or multisyllabic—should not be the end goal of instruction (and it is certainly not the end goal of reading in general). Proficient readers read most words automatically, by sight.
- Any meaningful intervention will prioritize personally and socially meaningful contextual reading. This is the most promising and direct route to fluent reading for older students—not to mention the most efficient way to simultaneously develop vocabulary, strategic behavior, and knowledge associated with improved reading.

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