

July 2001

## An Early Intervention Initiative That Works (With Help)

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### Recommended Citation

DeVos, Laura; Astras-Sagorski, Melissa; Bowman, Amy; and McQueen, Jennifer (2001) "An Early Intervention Initiative That Works (With Help)," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 33: Iss. 4, Article 10. Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol33/iss4/10>

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# An Early Intervention Initiative That Works (With Help)

*Laura DeVos is principal at Cannonsburg Elementary in Rockford, Michigan, and also serves as director of reading for the district. She is a former treasurer, region representative, and member-at-large of the Michigan Reading Association. You can reach her by e-mail at: [ldevos@rockford.k12.mi.us](mailto:ldevos@rockford.k12.mi.us). She was assisted on this article by members of her faculty, Melissa Astras-Sagorski, a first-grade teacher; Amy Bowman, a second-grade teacher; Jennifer Gehrke, a resource room teacher; Jennifer McQueen, a second-grade teacher; and Terry Marmion, a veteran speech and language pathologist.*

In the fall of 1999, the first-grade teachers, resource room teacher, speech and language pathologist, and the principal at Cannonsburg Elementary in Rockford, Michigan, met during the summer to discuss alternatives for greater student support in the regular education classroom. After much discussion and planning, they decided to focus on reducing, if not preventing, the practice of identifying early elementary students as "at risk." The goal was to provide appropriate instruction using various strategies so that students could be successful instead of falling behind in their reading skills. We received the cooperation of the Rockford Public Schools' Special Education Department. This department funded some planning and preparation time for the teachers through a federal capacity grant. The special education department also gave the special education teachers the flexibility in their schedules to allow their participation. The Early Intervention team began to meet on a monthly basis in October of 1999.

## First Year: 1999-2000

The ensuing plan for delivery of the different strategies for learning success involved the resource room teacher and the speech and language pathologist teaching in the two first-grade classrooms for 30 minutes at least three times per week. The classroom teacher would team with the special education personnel, and the team would divide the class into three groups, usually according to ability. The groups would rotate each instructional day, allowing each teacher to meet with all groups a minimum of once during the week. The teachers would target these areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, listening and speaking skills, fine and gross motor development, visual memory development, and writing. As the teachers worked with the classroom groups, they adapted their group activity to fit the needs of that particular group. Groups were flexible, allowing students to move between groups if their achievement in that particular skill had improved or needed further improvement. In addition, the speech and language pathologist worked with each class as a whole group



on a strategy on a fourth day of the week. Title I paraprofessional assistance was given to identified students during the day outside the times of the early intervention initiative. Therefore, Title I students were able to receive the extra one-on-one support they needed.

In January of 2000, the occupational therapist was approached about cycling into the individual classrooms to work with the entire group of students, teaching them gross and fine motor refinement. In order to help them become more metacognitive about their learning, she started with the Alert Program that teaches students to know when their bodies

***The children are taught to use certain tools to attain, change, or maintain an optimal level of alertness and attending behaviors in the classroom.***

are running "too fast," "too slow," or "just right." This program uses the question phrase "How does your engine run?" or "How is your engine running right now?" to help the students think about their activity level relative to the task at hand. The children are taught to use certain tools to attain, change, or maintain an optimal level of alertness and attending behaviors in the classroom. The tools included a balloon filled with flour (fidget ball), which they could squeeze if they needed to move their hands. This program was incorporated into the classrooms for nine weeks in the spring of 2000.

During the course of the 1999-00 school year, the team visited Silver Spring Elementary School in Northville, Michigan. This staff has a very similar program in effect, but they have more assistance from special education personnel (more time allotted). We especially admired their visual memory exercises and the way they had the first-grade students paired with older students to complete the exercises. We decided to work at

producing some exercises for our students during the 2000-01 school year.

We visited a program in Holland, Michigan, and observed a model utilizing support teachers in classrooms where students needed the extra assistance. In the lower elementary grades the program was more of a pullout, and in the upper grades it was a push-in program. The support teachers were funded by federal grants allowing them more flexibility and more support personnel time than we have available to us.

Our assessment component for the first grades during the 1999-2000 school year consisted of letter and sound identification. The teacher dictated sentences, and the students wrote the sounds they heard. The sentences were then scored on the number of correct sounds written. In September the sentences were: *The bus is coming. It will stop here to let me get on.* In May, they are: *The boy is riding his bike. He can go very fast on it.* We also used a reading benchmark level; the highest level at which a student attains 90 percent is considered that student's instructional reading level. The assessments were given in September, January, and May in order to chart growth in each area and correspond to the regular Rockford reading assessments used district-wide. This ongoing assessment was used to guide instruction throughout the year.

At the end of our pilot year of the program, we recommended the retention in first grade of two students, both females. The retention was recommended not only for academic reasons, but for social and emotional reasons as well. At their parents' request, one student was retained and one was not. Two other students, one male and one female, were observed carefully for possible learning disabilities. In the late fall of 2000, these two students did qualify for special education services. The four students mentioned were the same students who had low scores in one or more of the assessment areas at the end of the year. Ninety-five percent of the students in first grade did achieve the expected benchmark reading level and were able to identify



and write the dictation sentence with 90 percent accuracy.

At the end of the 1999-2000 year, the team made the decision to continue the program the following year. The special education teachers would combine their services with the regular education teachers on the same basis. We also decided to expand the program to include second grade in our second year. There were two reasons for this: during the 2000-01 school year, we would have only one first grade and two second grades, and most importantly, we wanted to continue the program for another year with the same students. Cannonsburg School is usually a one-section K-5 school, but we had a large kindergarten class in 1998-99 that necessitated two sections. We hope to expand our program to include kindergarten, first, and second grades during the 2001-02 academic year.

In the fall of 2000, Parkside Elementary School began a similar program utilizing special education personnel in the regular classroom in both first grades. The Rockford Public Schools are working to incorporate similar programs throughout the district in the future.

### **Second Year: Refinement 2000-01**

A goal that we had for our program during its pilot year was the addition of sound enhancement systems for our lower elementary classrooms (K-2). Thanks to monies from the Rockford Public Schools technology bond issue, from our PTC, and from the state Teacher Technology Initiative, the goal will be attained during the summer of 2001. These sound systems allow students to hear and understand the teacher from any location in the room. The teacher's voice is magnified, and students who may have auditory difficulty are better able to comprehend. Because of the nature of lower elementary classrooms, the students move about the classroom and are often in different areas of the room when the teacher needs to speak to them. If students are not paying close attention when the teacher speaks, they often miss important di-

rections or information. We are very anxious to have these installed in the classrooms because we believe they will be an added tool for success.

Our second-year program is very similar to the one we had in place during 1999-2000. The speech pathologist and resource room teacher were able to expand their services to include all three classrooms, and the occupational therapist is working with the students once a week from October through April, seven months compared to nine weeks in the first year of the program.

Our main focus for refining our program was the visual memory component. The teachers invested

much time in setting up visual memory exercises and individual student record folders during the fall of 2000. Beginning in January 2001 the first-grade students were paired with fourth-graders once a week, and the two second-grade classrooms are with fifth-grade students every week. The teachers have devised exercises using the shape blocks from our math program in two-, three-, four-, and five- block combinations. The younger students view the block formation for three or five seconds and then are asked to reconstruct the configurations from memory. Students advance levels as prescribed criteria are met. We have found the visual memory component to be valuable as an assessment piece. There seems to be a correlation between difficulty with visual memory and reading/math reasoning. We will explore this correlation further in the future.

As we refine our assessments of the students in both grades, we have added a component of phonemic awareness. The Resource Room teacher assessed students in

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September on sound substitution, sound segmentation, syllable counting, rhyming, whole-word discrimination, and phoneme deletion. They will be tested on these again in mid-May to document growth. Because second grade was an addition this year, those students are assessed on the reading benchmark level expectations set by Rockford Public Schools for September, January, and May, and the reading range score they attain on the STAR reading assessment. The STAR reading assessment is a computer software testing program used for all second- through fifth-grade students in Rockford.

We continue to be encouraged by the progress we see with the students in the first

and second grades at Cannonsburg School. Test scores for September and January show growth for all students; we will not have final scores until June. Teachers feel they are better able to meet specific student needs by teaming with the resource room teacher, speech and language pathologist, and occupational therapist. The special education personnel component of the program is an added opportunity for sound assessment and best practice implementation. Our central office administration and school board have given their wholehearted support to the programs at Cannonsburg and Parkside. We feel fortunate to have this early intervention initiative solidly in place for our students.

## Michigan Reading Association - Membership Application

Check all that apply:

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☐ Title I  
☐ Paraprofessional  
☐ Adult Education  
☐ Elementary  
☐ Middle  
☐ Secondary  
☐ University  
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Payment:

- ☐ Regular Member ..... \$30.00  
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I am a member of (please circle):

International Reading Association      Yes      No

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Signature (Required on all credit card applications)

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Sorry NO PURCHASE ORDERS - prepaid orders only. Thank you.

Please remit form with payment to: MRA, 5241 Plainfield Ave NE Ste I, Grand Rapids, MI 49525-1060





## Call for Program Proposal

Michigan Reading Association,  
an affiliate of the  
International Reading Association,  
invites you to submit a  
program proposal for the

46th Annual Michigan Reading Association Conference

## MRA 2002: Ambassadors for Literacy

Saturday, March 16 through Tuesday, March 19, 2002

Cobo Center and Marriott Renaissance Center, Detroit, Michigan

Michigan Reading Association members and literacy advocates are invited to submit program proposals for the 2002 Conference. **Proposals must be postmarked no later than October 1, 2001.** All proposals will be considered by the Program Committee. Notification of the committee's decision will be sent no later than October 31, 2001. The person submitting the proposal is responsible for notifying co-presenters of the Program Committee's decision.

**Program presenters do not receive honoraria or reimbursement for travel, hotel or related expenses. All presenters and co-presenters must register and pay for the conference. Overhead projector and screen will be provided. Handouts and any additional A/V equipment will be the responsibility of the presenters.**

Please submit a separate form for each proposal.

### Factors that tend to enhance a proposal:

- ◆ specific and descriptive program abstract that does not need editing
- ◆ relevance and interest of program to proposed audience
- ◆ clarity, conciseness and coherence of proposal
- ◆ thoroughness of planning and preparation
- ◆ interaction across the disciplines and across roles (teachers, parents, administrators)
- ◆ new issues or topics; innovative ways of viewing more traditional issues
- ◆ evidence of familiarity with current practices and/or research

### Factors that tend to disqualify a proposal:

- ◆ promotion of commercial materials or programs
- ◆ content completely unrelated to reading or literacy
- ◆ failure to complete the proposal according to guidelines

### Submit completed proposals to:

Michigan Reading Association  
5241 Plainfield Avenue, NE  
Suite I, Box 10  
Grand Rapids, MI 49525  
(800) 672-7323

### Questions or Information Contact:

Paul T. Wilson  
Email: wilsonp@wmich.edu  
Tel: (616) 375-0786  
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# MRA Program Proposal

SUBMITTAL DEADLINE: POSTMARKED OCTOBER 1, 2001

I understand that MRA does not provide honoraria or expenses. All presenters and co-presenters for this session will register and pay for the conference.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Person submitting Proposal:

Dr. Ms. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_  
First Name Last Name  
Institution/District: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## II. Co-Presenters (limited to 3):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution/District: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution/District: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution/District: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

## III. Topic Area (no more than 3):

<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Multicultural Literacy
<input type="checkbox"/> Content Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers in Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy/Politics/Social Action
<input type="checkbox"/> Explicit Instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Remedial Instruction
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Science
<input type="checkbox"/> Gifted/Talented	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies
<input type="checkbox"/> Guided Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Storytelling
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrated Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Students at Risk
<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology and Literacy
<input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing
<input type="checkbox"/> MEAP	
<input type="checkbox"/> MLPP	

## IV. Of Interest to:

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-School
<input type="checkbox"/> Primary Grades
<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate Grades
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle School
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<input type="checkbox"/> Parents
<input type="checkbox"/> Adult Education
<input type="checkbox"/> College
<input type="checkbox"/> Administrators
<input type="checkbox"/> Compensatory Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Researchers

## V. Title of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

No more than ten words

## VI. Presentation Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

VII. Abstract: On a separate sheet of paper, type your title, presenters' information and your abstract. Describe the content of your presentation, in no more than 60 words. PROPOSALS SUBMITTED WITHOUT AN ABSTRACT ARE CONSIDERED INCOMPLETE. THIS ABSTRACT WILL APPEAR IN THE PROGRAM BOOK AND WILL BE EDITED IF NECESSARY.

VIII. Session Time (min): \_\_\_\_\_ 50 \_\_\_\_\_ 110 \_\_\_\_\_ Institute (3 hours) \_\_\_\_\_ Round Table (15 min. repeated 3 times)  
Day Preference: \_\_\_\_\_ Sat. \_\_\_\_\_ Sun. \_\_\_\_\_ Mon. \_\_\_\_\_ Tues.  
Willing to Repeat: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, check information below \_\_\_\_\_ No  
\_\_\_\_\_ Consecutive time slots \_\_\_\_\_ Same day, NOT consecutive slots \_\_\_\_\_ Different day  
Audience Size: \_\_\_\_\_ 70-100 \_\_\_\_\_ 101-250 \_\_\_\_\_ 251-400 \_\_\_\_\_ 401-600 \_\_\_\_\_ 600 or more

IX. Audio Visual: Overhead and screen will be provided. Any additional A/V equipment and handouts will be the responsibility of the presenter.

X. Room Set-Up: All rooms will be set up theater-style unless otherwise requested by October 1, 2001 and approved by the Conference Chair.