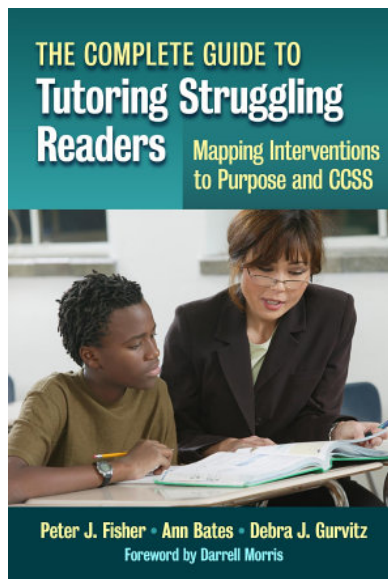


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## *Review of **The Complete Guide to Tutoring Struggling Readers: Mapping Interventions to Purpose and CCSS***

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Fisher, P., Bates, A., & Gurvitz, D. J. (2014). *The complete guide to tutoring struggling readers: Mapping interventions to purpose and CCSS*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

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Fisher, Bates, and Gurvitz (2014) stated in the preface of their book, *The Complete Guide to Tutoring Struggling Readers*, that it is “is designed for educators who want to plan and implement lessons for struggling readers that align with the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards” (p. xi). Having been a course instructor who teaches pre-service teachers how to teach reading in elementary and secondary settings as well as an assistant instructor in a Reading Clinic, I would add that this book could be helpful for new teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators. For example, teacher educators who want to provide their students with the fundamentals of reading and writing instruction would benefit by using this book as a way to introduce instructional strategies.

This comprehensive text begins with a brief explanation of the concept of tutoring, and follows with eight chapters that guide the reader through administering and interpreting assessments to creating lessons that support fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Because the book is designed to support tutors who work with students who may have already experienced frustration and negative association with reading, the authors address supporting motivational needs as well as academic ones. The book concludes with a chapter that establishes a connection between reading and writing instruction. The authors anchor their instruction in the Common Core State Standards.

“Tutoring is a luxury most teachers do not have” (p. 9). It is this sentence that makes the reader think twice. While the reader may have opened this book with the contextual idea that tutors are Advanced Placement high school students helping a freshman who is wrestling with chemistry, after reading the first chapter, the reader will have a new understanding of the word. Being a tutor, according

to the authors, means spending time, often one-on-one time, in order to provide intense student-centered support to learners. The tutor is often a teacher who works separately with a student who is not exercising their own abilities. Individuals who read this book will immediately be introduced to important considerations when beginning intensive instruction. These considerations range from broad ideas, such as supporting vocabulary needs, to narrow ones, such as the idea that students are more likely to engage with humorous texts. The authors also clearly define the responsibilities of the tutor: listening to the student, releasing skill or task responsibility gradually, supporting motivation, student-tutor collaboration, and planning.

Chapter Two explains what tutors should consider when planning their sessions. The authors discuss just how valuable each and every minute is during a tutoring session and, therefore, how planning for a session is a time-consuming, but essential part of the process. Lessons are designed to help students become more successful and engaged readers. When developing a lesson, the tutor should consider the grade level of the student, the order of events occurring during the lesson, and the components of reading that would best benefit the student. They state that, most likely, one of the following reading concerns will be a problem area for students: print, vocabulary, comprehension, or fluency. The authors stress that a tutor will not necessarily eliminate a concern, but will need to choose which concerns to emphasize during lessons.

The second chapter continues with several partial sample lesson plans, which the authors term “interventions,” for students of different ages. The lessons are first outlined, and then explained in detail. Examples are given for strategies that are referenced. The authors also stress that daily reading of connected texts is an essential

component of helping students become more successful readers. The text, however, is not designed to support tutors who may be working with learners with exceptional needs who may need interventions tailored to their individual learning differences.

The authors discuss each of the aforementioned potential problem areas, including print, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency by dedicating a chapter to each one. They also supplement these critical areas with additional information on how oral language and literacy are tied together and the relationship between reading and writing. The topics addressed by the authors provide a detailed examination of typical reasons students may fall behind their peers and how to support these students. In order, these topics are as follows: print skills (chapter three), contextual reading and fluency (chapter four), vocabulary (chapter five), oral language (chapter six), comprehension (chapter 7), and the reading-writing connection (chapter eight).

Chapters Three through Eight use similar formats, which is helpful in supporting the reader-tutor who may be searching for specific information on a strategy or lesson as they return to this book time and time again. The chapters' predictability make the book easier to navigate and use a reference tool. The chapters open with a vignette about a student during a tutoring session in order to illustrate what a tutor learned and how this new knowledge can influence future tutoring sessions. This contextualization would especially be helpful for tutors who are not in a classroom setting and would, therefore, benefit from a narrative description that indicates how to identify struggles. The authors also stress the idea that tutors should constantly be reflecting on the sessions and developing upcoming sessions based on what they have learned. Though

repetitive, these reminders do assist the reader's understanding. It is all too easy to focus on assessment scores instead of listening to the student and consistently updating their support.

Each chapter continues with an explanation of the chapter's main topic, a matrix of activities that are linked to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and then samples of scaffolded activities that can be used to support engagement and skill development. The reader learns how to choose appropriate materials for his, her, or their student, how to assess current levels, how to understand the assessment and then how to support the student's growth as a reader. Each chapter provides lessons for instruction with a variety of age groups and reading levels. The vocabulary used in each chapter is especially helpful; new teachers will not only gain tutoring skills, but also ways to professionally discuss what they are doing with colleagues and parents.

The reader should not pass by this thin publication with the notion that it could not possibly support the novice tutor. Each of the 200 pages is chock full of information. On pages 93 and 94, the authors describe how to use a semantic map during vocabulary instruction and provide an example of a completed semantic map graphic organizer. On page 41, the authors provide a list of important terms, with definitions, to use when teaching phonological awareness. New instructors will have a detailed understanding of phonemic awareness or the alphabetic principle after reading Chapter Three. On page 141, the reader will learn ways to teach students how to coordinate learning text features by the ABCDEF strategy: Attack the title, Be aware of bold words, Capture the captions, Determine the main idea, Examine the graphics, and Fish for facts. A reader can open the thin book randomly to any page and find a useful idea for tutoring instruction.

While the authors may simplify what can be a complex task, they do so in order to give the new tutor a starting place. After reading this text, tutors will have the skills necessary to begin working with readers who need additional support for better comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary skills. This text provides a strong framework for new educators as well as reminders for those who have been teaching for years. The text, however, falls short in one primary area: the student demographic. The authors assert, “When students enter a tutoring situation, they usually have experienced at least a year of failure in terms of literacy learning in school...” (p. 1). This reviewer, a previous teacher of middle school special education students, hesitates to use the word *failure* to discuss students who are not making progress toward the Common Core State Standards on grade level. The authors limit their concept of a struggling reader to those within a general education setting; their text does not provide support for tutors working with learners who may need more intensive reading instruction or assistance.

When providing examples of students who are struggling, coupled with instructional suggestions that could be used to support them, the authors use a wide range of ages and even discuss students who may have immigrated to the United States recently. However, the authors only give a nod to the Response to Intervention (RTI) system, which is designed to identify students with learning and behavior needs. Students who do not respond positively to the RTI system are then considered for additional testing and potential placement into a special education program. The authors do not address special education students’ needs. The strategies provided in the text are useful for general education students; however, a new tutor working with special education students may wonder why progress occurs significantly slower than the book suggests. There is no mention of working with students who have dyslexia, moderate intellectual differences, or specific learning disabilities in reading and writing literacies. While this reviewer recognizes that addressing these topics is beyond the scope of the book, the authors should have noted what population of students would best benefit from the lessons and suggestions.