

inZone Books
Research Base

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Introduction

Over the past few years, initiatives within the No Child Left Behind federal legislation have generated a commitment to focus on improving reading education in our schools. While most attention focused on early literacy instruction, the recent interest in the literacy needs of adolescent readers has surfaced.

The report *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*, commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in conjunction with the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004), has generated a commitment to address the quality of reading instruction in middle and high schools today. According to the *Reading Next* report, approximately eight million fourth through twelfth graders struggle to read at grade level and up to 70 percent of older readers require some form of remediation. To address this issue, *Reading Next* identified fifteen elements aimed at improving middle and high school literacy achievement that provides the foundation needed to move adolescent students forward.

National Geographic School Publishing / Hampton-Brown used the most current scientifically-based research in the development of *inZone Books* designed to inspire striving readers in grades 6-12 and promote independent reading. Three key elements defined in the *Reading Next* report state in order to improve adolescent literacy achievement in middle and high schools, programs must include motivation and self-directed learning, provide access to diverse texts, and use text-based collaborative learning. These key elements were used in the development of *inZone Books* and are described in more detail in this report.

Motivation and Self-directed Learning

Reading Next stresses the need to promote greater student engagement and motivation for adolescent learners. As students progress through the grades, they often become increasingly tuned out, often as a result of texts that are not motivating and are too difficult to read. Providing accessible texts and building student choice into the school day are important ways to reawaken student engagement.

In ***Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners*** (2007), Dr. Deborah Short recognizes the importance of motivation as a factor in helping adolescent struggling readers become more successful in school. According to Dr. Short, most students tend to be more motivated and more successful in reading when they have meaningful opportunities to exercise choice. Choice can mean choice of text (deciding what to read), choice of task (selecting what sort of reading or writing project to do with the text), or choice of partner (picking a partner with whom to do a project).

inZone Books can easily be used to provide optimum levels of choice for students to increase their motivation to read. With a wide variety of genres—from classics that have inspired readers for decades to contemporary fiction that reflects the diversity of the U.S.—and a range of reading levels, students can exercise their choice as an independent reader with **inZone Books**. Opportunities are also available in the Student Journal for students to plan for opportunities to meet and discuss their reading, allowing more choice for students.

inZone Books titles have been selected to engage and motivate middle and high school struggling readers. Throughout each **inZone Book**, students have access to in-book supports through the use of the “On-Page Coach” to help build reading power. The “On-Page Coach” provides students with a preview of key concepts from the literature designed to build background prior to reading. The “On-Page Coach” also includes the “On-Page Glossary” which provides substitute words or phrases to help students read more fluently. Struggling readers often get stuck on these words, idioms, or phrases, but with the “On-Page Glossary” in each **inZone Book**, students will be able to access the text which in turn supports comprehension.

inZone Books are broken into manageable “chunks”, or reading sections, to support comprehension and fluency and provide opportunities to check for understanding before moving to the next “chunk.”

Well-presented text includes visual cues, such as spacing that divides sentences into “chunks” or meaningful-thought units that highlight main ideas and relations between ideas (Simmons and Kame’enui, 1998). “Chunked” text enables readers to identify the relevant information central to comprehension. Reducing text into more manageable units enables readers to learn in an economical fashion, extract ideas, and recall text (Wood, Woloshyn, and Willoughby, 1995).

inZone Books provide opportunities to check for understanding with the “Before Your Move On” feature, found at the end of each reading “chunk.” This feature fosters independence to help students self-monitor their comprehension and includes questions that promote metacognitive thinking that good readers engage in as they read independently. Each ***inZone Book*** includes questions in “Before You Move On” as another built-in support to scaffold instruction for students as they become more motivated, self-directed learners.

Text-based Collaborative Learning

Talking with others about ideas and work is fundamental to learning, so when students work in small groups they should not only discuss a topic, but also interact with each other around a text (Resnick, 1999). According to the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, in order for student collaboration to be meaningful, it needs to be accountable. Accountable talk sharpens students' thinking by reinforcing their ability to build and use knowledge (Resnick, 1999).

inZone Books are designed to facilitate collaborative, accountable learning. At the end of every ***inZone Book***, a unique feature called “The Exchange” promotes thinking and authentic conversation about the book. “The Exchange” provides students with ideas for discussion so they can learn from their peers and connect reading to their lives.

Each book is built around an “Exchange” question. These questions are big ideas that are relevant to the literacy lives of adolescents and are worthy of their discussion. “The Exchange” questions prompts students to be active participants in their learning. Additional probing questions are included as well to assist students in their collaborative discussion and a reflection section is available to help students process what they have read. “The Exchange” feature in ***inZone Books*** fosters student independence which promotes student engagement and motivation.

Diverse Texts

As indicated by *Reading Next*, diverse texts provide students with texts representing a wide range of topics at a variety of reading levels. Students should be able to find representatives of themselves in the *inZone Books* and should also be able to find representation of others about whom they wish to learn. High-interest, low-difficulty texts play a significant role in adolescent literacy programs and are critical for fostering the reading skills of struggling readers and engagement of all students (Biancarosa and Snow, 2004). *inZone Books* address the need to have a range of texts in the classroom that link to multiple ability levels and connect to students' background experiences. Each 'Zone' includes 9–22 different titles with varied formats that include chapter books, graphic novels, and picture books, providing a variety and diversity of offerings from which students may select.

Struggling readers also need exposure to enabling texts that move beyond a sole cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find relevant to their own lives (Tatum, 2007). Not only are *inZone Books* diverse in their engaging topics (teen immigration, peer pressure, self-discovery, adventures across time and space, surviving wilderness and war, and more), but they also vary in reading level (see chart below).

inZone Books Leveling Chart

| Zone | Gr. 4-8 Sets | Gr. 9-12 Sets | Lexile Range | Grade-Level Readability |
|------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | • | • | 200L-700L | 1-3 |
| 2 | • | • | 650L-950L | 4-5 |
| 3 | • | • | 850L-1075L | 6-7 |
| 4 | | • | 1000L-1150L | 8-9 |

References

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