

**Title:** "Diverse Learners and the Tyranny of Time: Don't Fix Blame; Fix the Leaky Roof"

**Full Citation:** Kameenui, E. J. (1993, February). "Diverse Learners and the Tyranny of Time: Don't Fix Blame; Fix the Leaky Roof." *The Reading Teacher*, 46, 376–383.

**Subject(s):** Dyslexia/Reading Disabilities, Intervention

**Grade Level:** All Grades

**Synopsis:** Kameenui argues that we need to face the realities of diversity in our classrooms: children in poverty, neglected and abused children, children who are behind in reading and language development right from the start. He says that we should set aside our quest for "the single right best method" for teaching reading and get to work helping these children catch up. Educators should have a sense of urgency about our task, because these children face "the tyranny of time." If they don't catch up with their peers early and quickly, they will fall further and further behind. There is overwhelming evidence that intervention needs to happen in the first few years of school to avoid the "Matthew effect" documented by Stanovich (1986). (Also see Juel [1988] about the high probability that a child who is a poor reader at the end of Grade 1 will remain a poor reader at the end of Grade 4.)

Some studies show that teachers begin to feel "pedagogical paralysis" in the fact of a high concentration of low-achieving students in their classrooms. "In a study of teachers' teaching efficacy, Smylie [1988] observed, 'The lower the achievement level of students in the class, the less likely teachers seem to be to believe that they can affect student learning, despite the level of confidence they may have in their knowledge and skills related to teaching.'" "Equally problematic, however, is the tendency for educators to engage in fashionable experimentation—experimentation that often draws on fad and fashion (Kameenui, 1991; Slavin, 1989)—rather than well-established and documented practice. This kind of experimentation often occurs when teachers are unsure of what to do with children who are behind."

The article presents six general pedagogical principles (Dixon, Carnine, & Kameenui, 1992) that "offer a conceptual framework for informing our decisions about how to develop the early reading and literacy experiences of these [at-risk] students:"

- "1. Instructional time is a precious commodity; do not lose it." Choose the most efficient way to teach a lesson.
- "2. Intervene and remediate early, strategically, and frequently. . . . The following applications should be considered:
  - "Provide children with more frequent opportunities to read.
  - "Promote instructional arrangements that allow children to actively participate in literacy activities; for example, small group story reading instead of one-to-one or whole-class instruction (Morrow & Smith, 1990).
  - "Help children develop phonemic awareness and knowledge of letter names early."
- "3. Teach less more thoroughly."
- "4. Communicate reading strategies in a clear and explicit manner, especially during initial phases of instruction."

“5. Guide student learning through a strategic sequence of teacher-directed and student-centered activities.”

“6. Examine the effectiveness of instruction and educational tools by formatively evaluating student progress.”

#### Sources Cited

Dixon, R., Carnine, D. W., & Kameenui, E. J. (1992). *Curriculum Guidelines for Diverse Learners*. Monograph for National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

Morrow, L. M., & Smith, J. K. (1990). The Effect of Group Size on Interactive Storybook Reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 25, 213–231.

Smylie, M. A. (1988). The Enhancement Function of Staff Development: Organizational and Psychological Antecedents to Individual Teacher Change. *American Educational Research Journal*, 25, 1–30.

**Quote(s):** “Intervene and remediate early, strategically, and frequently. . . . The following applications should be considered:

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