



Education Review

Reseñas Educativas

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February 15, 2023

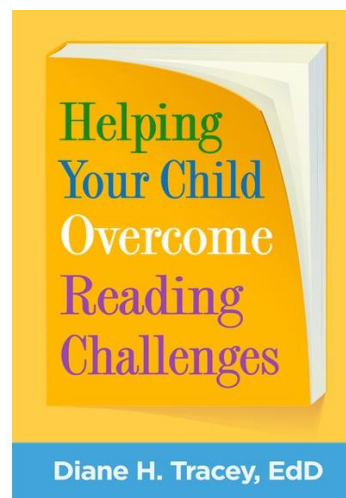
ISSN 1094-5296

Tracey, D. H. (2021). *Helping your child overcome reading challenges*. Guilford Press.

Pp. 178

ISBN: 978-462543809

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This is not a traditional professional text for educators or academics, but instead a volume designed to aid the development of struggling readers. Diane Tracey has created this unique resource to support parents with helping their struggling reader, since "... parents want to help their children, but they often just don't know how" (p. 1). The text affords parents knowledge, skills, and actions within two essential areas for struggling reader remediation. First, it

provides them with the skills to identify the reading area deficiencies causing reading problems. Second, it presents strategies and resources parents can use to address any reading challenges their child may be experiencing. As an expert teacher, literacy educator and now a psychotherapist, with extensive knowledge and experience, the author is well equipped to guide parents as they navigate this unfamiliar terrain.

The text is aligned with seminal research on students experiencing reading difficulties. For example, researchers have concluded there is no singular reason for the reading challenges of struggling readers (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Dennis, 2013). To determine the areas of challenge, they suggest assessments covering the big five areas of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Smith and Miller (2018) added motivation as a consideration when addressing areas of challenge for struggling readers, while Tracey emphasizes visual processing as a potential cause for reading challenges. In this volume, the author makes this research relevant for parents, highlighting the importance of the five areas identified above using non-academic language.

The text is structured to provide essential knowledge about reading difficulties in an easily followed format. Chapter 1 begins the text with an overview of reading difficulties as well as positioning of the author as an expert to provide this information. Next, Chapters 2 and 3 provide information about academic and non-academic foundational components of reading. The author frames the text around what she refers to as the literacy pyramid. This pyramid, presented in Chapter 2 of the text, is an enhancement of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs pyramid. Tracey's literacy pyramid centers literacy skills along with other foundations that undergird brain function, such as nutrition, sleep, exercise, and behavior, which, if left unaddressed, will prevent students from being able to participate in reading activities. Chapter 4 provides information to help with determining the areas of reading difficulty. The remaining chapters provide parents with strategies for overcoming student reading challenges.

The final six chapters provide the reader with strong support for understanding and remediating the identified areas of challenge. Each chapter contains background information and key terms associated with the area, examples from parents of struggling readers who share their unique strategies, and specific at-home activities recommended by classroom teachers. A bonus for readers is that these activities do not require expensive resources and may be accomplished using books from the library and free online sources that are engaging and fun for learners. Importantly, also noted in these chapters is the advice to consult professionals if problems continue, and follow professional guidance when they share the concerns.

There are two hidden gems in this text. First, Tracey intentionally includes the voice of real parents by highlighting their own unique ideas. Using stories representing three different family contexts—a traditional couple, a divorced mother, and an immigrant family—the text presents authentic reading challenges and parents' thoughts in response to these challenges. For example, one story of a parent and the struggles her child experienced with reading detailed the steps she took to help her child as well as the outcome for the family. The inclusion of parent voices potentially removes the anxiety some parents may feel about their child experiencing reading challenges. Second, there is a focus placed on the importance of nutrition. To help parents address nutrition issues, the author presents a sample nutrition improvement plan on page 17. This powerful resource allows for a gradual, realistic positive change to the nutritional patterns for the child.

The text features commonly overlooked reading components such as phonological awareness (Chapter 6) and code switching (Chapter 8) that parents might want to focus. Phonics and comprehension are generally thought of as the most important areas for struggling readers. However, as Tracey notes, phonological skills are foundational and essential because phonics success is linked to a child's awareness and ability to hear and manipulate sounds. The discussion in Chapter 8 of code switching is a topic

that I have never seen in other parent-focused texts. The term is defined for readers as the ability of an individual to communicate in both a cultural dialect and Standard English. Code switching, defined as the ability to communicate in both cultural dialect and Standard English, is presented as a strength and not a deficit. Parents are encouraged to help their child to master this skill. This information is beneficial to parents, as many families shy away from using the use of their cultural dialect, believing falsely that it is less important than Standard English.

Chapter 8 also provides an analysis of strategies like questions and graphic organizers, which parents can use before, during, and after reading a specific text. As a teacher educator, I emphasize the importance and value of graphic organizers for learner growth. The graphic organizers presented include semantic maps, feature analysis, and Venn diagrams as strategies to help the learner engage more deeply with making meaning of unfamiliar words. Another helpful discussion emerges in Chapter 9, where the author places a balanced emphasis on narrative and informational texts, in terms of both structure and overall importance. Most non-educators immediately select narrative texts for focus and think informational text understanding will develop equally. This balanced approach is meaningful as struggling readers often fail to comprehend narrative and informational texts at the same levels (Smith & Miller, 2018).

Although this volume has several strengths, readers should approach some areas with caution when reading this text. Chapter 3 on the reading process is very complex and might be information overload for some readers. The questions asked while reading with a child (featured in Chapter 9) might be challenging for a parent with no experience in teaching reading. A better set of questions might be those aligned with the question-answer relationships model (QAR; Raphael & Au, 2006), which focuses on questions in four areas: “right there” (answers can be found easily in the text); “think and search” (answers require the use of information from several areas of the text); “author and me” (answers use a combination of the text information and their own experience); and “on my own” (answers require users to go beyond the information in the text to answer, usually opinion based). Last, while Tracey shares many helpful strategies to address reading challenges, the chapter on motivation for reading was not as strong. It lacked concrete strategies aligned to the key areas of motivation to read.

If the reader has limited time to read this text, I suggest starting at Chapter 4, the section focused on helping parents determine the underlying causes of their child’s reading difficulties. It contains a series of checklists addressing the following foundational areas: physiological well-being, emotional well-being, behavior, visual processing, auditory processing, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension including metacognition, reading level, motivation, and attention. After exploring this chapter, the reader can use the checklists to determine areas of challenge for the child. The findings from the checklists will help the reader proceed to the appropriate subsequent

chapters, which will help them with what they should do to support the areas of difficulty.

As a literacy educator and former classroom teacher, I recommend *Helping Your Child Overcome Reading Challenges* as a resource for several audiences. For parents, it will inspire and assist them as they address reading difficulties with their child. Through a combination of research-based and practical strategies, strong examples, easy-to-implement activities, and rich literacy resources, this volume is designed to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help parents improve the reading performance of their struggling readers. For new school administrators with limited knowledge of reading difficulties, I believe this text can serve as a resource to create a better understanding of why children experience reading challenges. This information can help them to actively participate in and lead conversations with parents and teachers centered around ideas for struggling reader diagnosis and instruction.

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About the Reviewer

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Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State

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