



Lifers: Learning from At-Risk Adolescent Readers

Pam Mueller

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Aaron. Alexis. Bob. Carol. Christian. Cody. David. Eric. Frank. Jasmine. Kayla. Keith. Kim. Kristin. Kristy. Mark. Mick. Patti. Paul. Sergio. Sierra. Stan.

These are Pam Mueller's pseudonyms for the twenty-two very real high school students she researched, observed, interviewed, and worked closely with, in preparation for this powerful narrative. "They're all lifers," she writes, "students who have spent all their lives in remedial programs . . . students who have much to teach us . . . if only we will listen."

Listen she did and she presents their stories in their own words to support her strong plea for a much more effective literacy curriculum. "Their voices validate much of the research conducted over the past thirty years in the field of reading instruction," Mueller comments. "What is surprising is how despite this knowledge we have continued to employ faulty classroom practices. . . . Lifers they have become, and lifers they will remain."

Unwilling to accept this premise, Mueller offers her own solutions through three reading workshops that she and her colleagues implemented. The first lays the foundation for change through goal setting, reading activities, study strategies, ongoing assessment and evaluation, and more. But that's just for starters. For students who need additional help, Reading Workshop II was created, where smaller groups of lifers can discover the power of language, both oral and written, in a safe and supportive setting. And to help the neediest readers, they developed Reading Rebound, an individualized remedial class modeled after Marie Clay's Reading Recovery program. All three workshops are fully described in the book.

And throughout, the voices of the lifers are heard - loud and clear - in their own, often poignant, words.

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