

Evidence Based Literacy Instruction

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Classroom Instruction Best Practice

The National Inquiry into Teaching of Literacy in Australia (2005) states; *“in sum, the incontrovertible finding from the extensive body of local and international evidence-based literacy research is that for children in the early years of schooling (and subsequently if needed), to be able to link their knowledge of spoken language to their knowledge of written language, they must first master the alphabetic code – the system of grapheme-phoneme correspondences that link written words to their pronunciations. Because these are both foundational and essential skills for the development of competence in reading, writing and spelling, they must be taught **explicitly, systematically, early and well.**”*

Explicitly: this means the essential skills for reading need to be taught directly rather than incidentally. Explicit teaching is where teaching follows a very important direct principal of instruction when helping students to acquire essential skills, or the ‘I do, we do, you do’ approach.

*“Explicit instruction is also systematic: there is a carefully planned sequence for instruction, not simply a spur of the moment approach. The plan is constructed in a logical sequence that proceeds in a hierarchy from simple to complex objectives.”*Hempenstall (2016) Read About It: Scientific Evidence for Teaching of Reading (p31)

Systematically: students are introduced to material moving from the simple to the complex. When it comes to the *early* teaching of reading this means that students are introduced to a small set of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (letter sounds or GPC’s) that they can quickly and successfully blend into syllables and words. The letters and sounds are introduced logically and incrementally. Student reading material is matched to what they have learned so they can successfully practice these skills and build their confidence, this is usually given through decodable readers.

Early: before students start school, they should be immersed in a language rich environment to build their vocabularies that will support learning to read in school. When children start school they should be formally taught alphabetic knowledge, letter sound correspondences and how these map to spoken language.

Well: means children’s essential reading skills are regularly checked and monitored to ensure they have been **taught to mastery.**

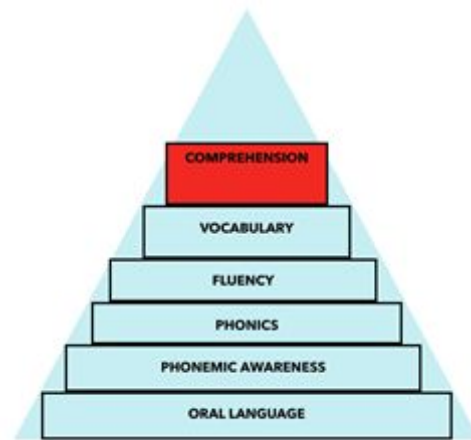
Literacy instruction is best implemented in a school within a response to intervention framework.

Tier 1 – high quality evidence based instruction for the whole school, this should include systematic and explicit instruction in phonics, along with phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Tier 2 – small group intervention for any students who are identified ‘at risk’ or those who may be performing below the expected level. It is similar to the high-quality instruction delivered in tier 1 only it is more intensive, targeted and has appropriately delivered repetition to allow for mastery.

Tier 3 – small group/individual assistance given for students who are still underachieving despite having taught via tier 1 and 2. It is intensive, explicit and sustained intervention using professionally produced, carefully developed and evidence based programs.

Effective literacy instruction includes 5 essential of areas



Phonemic awareness - Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify the sounds in spoken words. It is like phonics with a blindfold on. Many children develop phonemic awareness through songs, rhymes and listening to children’s books. However, it is often an area of difficulty for children with phonological Dyslexia. Poor phonemic awareness is a very good predictor of reading failure.

Phonics - Phonics is the alphabetic code of the English language. It is the relationship between speech sounds and how we represent them in writing using letters of the alphabet. Phonics utilises the ability to break down the code of a word into individual phonemes and attach them to graphemes. This is particularly important for children with Dyslexia who will often need a much more intensive approach to the teaching of phonics.

“Current research tells us unequivocally that struggling learners benefit: When the structure of spoken and written language, beginning with phonemes, is represented for them explicitly, sequentially, directly and systematically in the context of a comprehensive reading program” Birsh and Ghassemi 2010

“The evidence is clear that the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way of teaching young children to read, particularly those at risk of having problems with reading.” Rose review, England (2006)

Fluency- Fluency is achieved when children have gained enough mastery and automaticity of phonics and high frequency words that their reading seems effortless. Often children with Dyslexia don't have the automaticity of the alphabetic code to achieve accurate reading at a flowing speed.

Decodable readers enable faster recognition of words, which in turn reduces the amount of mental energy required to decode the text. This facilitates the building of automaticity and fluency.

Vocabulary - Knowing the meaning of words is essential for comprehension. The ability to read a word is essentially meaningless without understanding the word. Early exposure to conversations and being read to is of paramount importance to developing a rich bank of spoken vocabulary. It is also important to explicitly teach children vocabulary.

Comprehension - Comprehension is the extraction of meaning from text and is the end point for reading. It requires a set of complex foundational skills as discussed. Any deficit in any of these skills will hinder comprehension. A child who cannot read at a word or sentence level or a child with poor vocabulary will have impaired comprehension. A child without adequate fluency, poor working memory or attentional issues may lose the meaning of the text.

“Teaching reading [comprehension] strategies is worthwhile, but we should bear in mind that knowledge of strategies is only a small part of what makes an effective reader. A good reader also decodes fluently, has a broad vocabulary, and has wide-ranging background knowledge.” Willingham (2006)

For more detailed information please see the following links

Here is a link to phonemic awareness activities and a detailed explanation.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-now-brown-cow-phoneme-awareness-activities>

<http://www.fivefromfive.org.au/five-keys-to-reading/>

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