



Australian Government  
Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations

# Principals as Literacy Leaders



Revised and extended by:  
**Griffith University**  
**Flinders University**

MODULE 2:  
WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW  
ABOUT LEARNING TO READ



**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY

# Principals As Literacy Leaders

## Module 2

### What Leaders Need To Know About Learning To Read

Revised and extended by:

**Griffith University**  
**Flinders University**

From original resource material developed by:

**The Australian Primary Principals Association**  
**Griffith University**  
**Edith Cowan University**  
**The Australian Catholic University**

as part of the Principals as Literacy Leaders Pilot Project 2009

## Principles Informing the Development of PALL Modules

- Values and builds on the knowledge and experience of the principals
- Facilitates the sharing of principals' expertise, both with each other and with their school communities
- Introduces the principals to relevant theoretical understandings and classroom practices grounded in evidence-based research
- Encourages principals to critically reflect on their practice and on issues surrounding the teaching of literacy in their schools
- Includes an ICT element where relevant
- Reflects standards as appropriate
- Links to recent research, reports and policy documents
- Addresses the diverse needs of the principals (eg degree of experience, level of expertise, rural/metropolitan, high NESB population)
- Includes a variety of activities and resources (workshop activities, discussions, notes on session format, readings, powerpoint presentations, web links, video clips, lists of resources, etc)
- Written in language that is appropriate for this audience.

## **Module 2**

# **What Leaders Need To Know About Learning To Read**

### **Overview of Module**

The module will outline evidence-based research about the effective teaching and learning of reading. The foundation role of early language and literacy experiences that impact on reading skill development will be highlighted. The importance of phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension will be examined. Implications of this research for educators and students will be highlighted.

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*with reference to original source material from the  
Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) Pilot Project*

### **Planned Learning Outcomes**

On completion of this module, principals will be aware of:

1. evidence-based research about reading acquisition;
2. effective teaching principles for students who struggle with reading acquisition;
3. what effective teaching of reading “looks like” throughout the primary years;
4. the role of the principal in leading effective literacy instruction across the school;
5. the usefulness of undertaking an audit of the reading practices of their teachers.

These outcomes reflect the following categories of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint*:

- Professional Development
- A Strong Evidence Base
- Conditions for Learning
- Curriculum and Teaching
- Shared Leadership

## **SUMMARY OF SESSIONS**

### **Reading Acquisition: The Evidence Base; Introduction to the Big Six**

- Top-down and bottom-up approaches to the teaching of reading will be presented within the context of the major findings of research into the effective teaching of reading. Particular emphasis will be placed on the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (DEST, 2005) and the Rose Review (2006).
- An overview of the skills and knowledge required for the development of fluent reading, framed as the “Big Six”, will be presented.

This session reflects the following category of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint*:

- A Strong Evidence Base

### **Development of Oral Language and Early Literacy Experiences, Phonological Awareness and Letter-Sound Knowledge**

Points of emphasis will include:

- highlighting the importance of early oral language development and literacy experiences as the foundations of reading success;
- the significance of phonological awareness;
- letter-sound knowledge which builds on phonemic awareness;
- word recognition skills and the importance of knowing single letter-sound relationships and common letter combinations, the most common rimes, high-frequency sight words and word derivations;
- the critical importance of *automaticity* of skills that frees up cognitive capacity for comprehension;
- synthetic and analytic approaches to teaching letter-sound knowledge;
- the research evidence behind the evidence-based preferred *synthetic* approach to teaching phonics.

This session reflects the following categories of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint*:

- Professional Development
- A Strong Evidence Base
- Curriculum and Teaching

## Development of Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension

Points of emphasis will include:

- **Comprehension:**  
the range of strategies that should be taught so students can successfully read and understand a range of text types.
- **Vocabulary Development:**  
how a broad vocabulary, knowledge of word derivations, prefixes and suffixes can support reading fluency and comprehension;
- **Fluency:**  
the link between fluency and comprehension with words not just read accurately and smoothly but with appropriate prosody;

This session reflects the following categories of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint*:

- Professional Development
- A Strong Evidence Base
- Curriculum and Teaching

## Indicators of Evidence-Based Literacy Practices (Literacy Practices Guide); Collecting the Evidence

This session will draw Module 2 information together around discussion of the Literacy Practices Guide (LPG). This tool provides a checklist for observation and reflection about effective literacy teaching and learning in the primary years. Each section contains descriptive statements to be considered. There is also space to record comments related to each of these dimensions, and to record the range of informal and formal assessments used.

Prior discussion about this checklist will orient the teacher and prepare the principal to undertake an audit of reading instruction practices across the school. This is a required activity to be undertaken before Module 3.

This session reflects the following categories of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint*:

- Professional Development
- A Strong Evidence Base
- Conditions for Learning
- Curriculum and Teaching
- Shared Leadership

## Relevant Standards that inform this Module

- Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA) relating to professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement
- Leadership for Learning Blueprint

## Readings

### Reading 1

DEST. (2005). *Teaching reading: National inquiry into the teaching of literacy*. Canberra: DEST. (pp. 111-63 and Glossary, pp. 84-90).

### Reading 2

Konza, D. (2006). The foundation skills of learning to read. In D. Konza, *Teaching children with reading difficulties* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 34-51). Melbourne: Thompson Social Science Press.

### Reading 3

Louden, W., Rohl, M., Barratt-Pugh, C., Brown, C., Cairney, T., House, H., Elderfield, J., Meiers, M., Rivalland, J., & Rowe, K. (2005). In teachers' hands: Effective literacy teaching practices in the early years of schooling. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 28(3), 173-253.

### Reading 4

Cunningham, P.M., Cunningham, J.W., Moore, S.A., & Moore, D.W. (2004). Emergent literacy. In P.M. Cunningham, J.W. Cunningham, S.A. Moore, & D.W. Moore, *Reading and writing in elementary classrooms: Research-based K-4 instruction* (pp.24 -54). Boston: Pearson.

### Reading 5 (a lengthy article but worth the effort for those seeking further information)

Rayner, K., Foorman, B.R., Perfetti, C.A., Pesetsky, D., & Seidenberg, M.S. (2004). How psychological science informs the teaching of reading. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2(2), 31-74.

## Relevant Reports or Policy Documents

DEST. (2005). *Teaching reading: National inquiry into the teaching of literacy*. Canberra: DEST. Executive summary.

Louden, W., Rohl, M., & Hopkins, S. (2008). *Teaching for growth*. WA Department of Education and Training.

## Related Web Links

Armbruster, B.B., & Lehr, F. (2003). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Centre for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

Available at <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/researchread.htm>

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Health. Available at

<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/summary.htm>

*What works: Improving outcomes for Indigenous students*. (2005). Barton, ACT: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. Available at

<http://www.whatworks.edu.au>

## Follow-up Activity: Analysis of School Literacy Practices

Principals will use the Literacy Practices Guide (LPG) to engage in a conversation with three teachers in their school, one from each of the following groups:

Foundation - Year 2

Years 3 - 5

Years 6 - 7

Classes may be selected on any basis – it could be teachers who engage in highly effective reading practices that could be used as a model, or classes where some professional development may be required, or a mix.

The LPG allows for the teacher and the principal to complete the same sections of the analysis, which then forms the basis for a conversation about literacy instruction.

It could have several components:

- Teacher completes the first section by reviewing their classroom organisation.
- Principal makes classroom visit: this could occur at a time when the class is or is not present (but the teacher should be aware the visit will take place). The aim of this process is to observe such features as the use of environmental print and word walls, the presence of literacy resources (e.g. thesauruses, rhyming dictionaries), cross-curricula literacy practices, and organisation of reading materials and space.
- Teacher and principal individually record notes and discuss literacy programming and planning documents e.g. types of texts read to and used by the class.
- At an agreed time, the principal observes a reading lesson and another learning area lesson to complete other sections of the LPG and to note students' responses.
- Teacher and principal use their responses to discuss the literacy needs of the students and reading instruction in the classroom by analysing areas of instructional strength and confirming areas where further support could be provided.



## Reading Acquisition: The Evidence Base; Introduction to the Big Six

### Session Format and Notes

#### ***Introduction***

Presenter outlines purpose of session, and some guidelines for involvement, including the encouragement of questions and contributions throughout, and how group feedback will be managed. Principals should be constantly reflecting how information and discussions relate to their school context and student population.

#### ***Presenter input with participant involvement***

The session then moves to presenter input regarding the evidence on which the PALL literacy position is based. This discussion includes major reports since Chall's 1967 review of empirical studies. These include Adam's 1990 review *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, the National Reading Panel Report (2000), the Rose Review (2006) and the Australian report, *Teaching Reading* (DEST, 2005), all of which came to similar conclusions. Five broad areas were identified, all of which were underpinned by oral language and early literacy experiences - knowledge derived before children arrived at school. Opportunities are provided for principals to consider assumptions of the *decoding* side of the debate with reference to evidence-based research:

- words can be decoded but not understood ;
- working memory limits are not consistent with reading rates of competent readers;
- pronunciation and comprehension generally require context.

#### ***Presenter input with participant involvement***

Participants will work through assumptions of the *top-down or whole-language* side of the debate with reference to the evidence-based research.

- skills required for learning oral language compared with those of learning to read;
- eye movement research reveals fluent reading involves decoding of almost every word;
- even skilled readers mentally "sound out" words;
- many students do not discover letter-sound correspondences without explicit instruction and this is particularly true for children from homes that do not provide rich early literacy experiences;
- fluent readers use context differently from poor readers;
- use of context requires about 90% word recognition skills;
- research evidence reveals that a pure top-down approach does not provide a full explanation of reading acquisition.

An overview of the “Big Six” elements that contribute to reading development will be highlighted (Konza, 2010).

1. Oral language and early literacy experiences
2. Phonological awareness
3. Letter-sound knowledge (alphabet and phonics)
4. Comprehension
5. Vocabulary
6. Fluency

## **Development of Oral Language and Early Literacy Experiences, Phonological Awareness and Letter-Sound Knowledge**

### **1. Oral language and early literacy experiences**

The overarching and pervasive role that oral language and early literacy experiences play in the development of reading. This introduction will highlight research relating to the significant vocabulary and language differences with which different cohorts of children arrive at school.

Participants will engage in discussion of the social and cultural factors that have an impact on the language of students in their schools.

### **2. Phonological awareness**

Participant activity on Phonological Awareness – the second of the Big Six.

Clarification of principals’ own phonological awareness. This assesses explicit understanding of phonological awareness as all literate individuals have an implicit understanding of this ability.

#### **Presenter input**

Work through broad divisions of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to perceive the sound properties of the English language. The most important phonological skill is phonemic awareness, the ability to hear, separate and manipulate the separate sounds (phonemes) in words. If students do not understand that a continuous stream of speech can be separated into words, syllables, and most importantly individual sounds or phonemes, they cannot relate those separate sounds to the letters of the alphabet.

Relate each step to one of the items in the principals' phonological assessment.

- Word awareness
- Syllable awareness
- Awareness of onset-rime division
- Awareness of individual phonemes
- Ability to blend and segment a series of phonemes

### 3. Letter-Sound Knowledge - Presenter input with principal participation

A language based on an alphabetic system requires decoding and is built on phonemic awareness. If students cannot segment the different sounds in a word, they cannot attach a letter to it or “map” the sounds onto paper – the alphabetic system simply doesn't make sense to them. Students will not become independent and successful readers without this knowledge. Points of emphasis will include:

Letter-sound knowledge is critical for the decoding process, but not just single letter-sound correspondences.

Readers need to know:

- ~ letter sounds and names;
- ~ common letter combinations; particular problems caused by vowels;
- ~ common onsets and rimes;
- ~ common spelling patterns – much greater consistency of English at letter cluster level;
- ~ base words and etymological roots;
- ~ high-frequency sight vocabulary;
- ~ the critical importance of **automaticity** in freeing up cognitive capacity for comprehension. This requires moving through the stages of learning accuracy, fluency, maintenance, and generalisation;
- ~ synthetic and analytic approaches to teaching phonics, with an explanation of why a **synthetic** approach is recommended for beginning and struggling readers.

#### Guided discussion

The claim is often made that students “can read but not understand” - the evidence for a student's ability to “read” is usually slow and halting efforts at decoding. This is then put forward as an argument against teaching decoding skills (“barking at print”) and concentrating on teaching students to use background knowledge and context to assist comprehension.

Is this a case for ceasing efforts to teach decoding skills? Are there flaws in this argument?

## Development of Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension

Guided discussion on the various ways in which children learn new vocabulary – what does this mean for students at their schools - low SES, Indigenous, English as a Second Language/culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds? Principals discuss the various issues affecting vocabulary growth in their schools.

### Presenter input on Vocabulary

Iteration of research on vocabulary differences between students on school entry and longer-term impact previously discussed.

- Explore different types and levels of vocabulary knowledge.

### Participant activity

Participants analyse the extent of their word knowledge by categorising words according to whether they;

1. have never seen or heard that word before;
2. have seen or heard it but do not know what it means;
3. vaguely know the meaning and can associate it with a concept or context; or
4. know the word well and could explain it to others.

- Problems with traditional approaches to vocabulary development.
- Importance of “word consciousness” and “deep learning” of new vocabulary.

### Fluency discussion and feedback

Explore the various elements of fluency – accuracy, rate and prosody (expression).

Principals discuss the advantages and disadvantages of teachers’ programming decisions to use e.g. SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), DEAR (Drop Everything And Read).

### Comprehension discussion

What are the core differences between fluent and poor readers?  
How differently do the two groups approach reading?

## Presenter input

- Summarise major points from discussion.
- What good readers do;
  - ~ understand why they are reading (their purpose);
  - ~ use an appropriate strategy, e.g. skim, scan, read closely for detail;
  - ~ access prior knowledge;
  - ~ monitor understanding of the material;
  - ~ assimilate new material into current knowledge;
  - ~ distinguish major content from detail;
  - ~ use a range of strategies to help understanding, such as rereading confusing sections, creating mental images, taking notes, summarising, using graphic forms such as retrieval charts or concept maps, and using a dictionary, glossary or thesaurus.
- Guidelines for teaching comprehension:
  - ~ teaching rather than testing;
  - ~ using some short texts;
  - ~ teaching comprehension from the earliest stages;
  - ~ checking readability levels.

## Indicators of Evidence-Based Literacy Practices (Literacy Practices Guide); Collecting the Evidence

### Linking activity

Brief recap of the Big Six as requirements for independent and successful reading. The absence of any one composite skill will affect establishment of fully developed reading ability.

### Presenter input: Literacy Practices Guide

Explanation of how LPG was developed. Explicit links made between indicators on LPG and research evidence regarding the requisite skills for reading and effective teaching of struggling students.

### Collecting the evidence

Discussion of how the LPG may be used to engage in conversations with three teachers, one from each of the following groups:

Foundation - Year 2

Years 3 - 5

Years 6 - 7

Discussion of any perceived difficulties in using the LPG in their school.

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