A Road Map to Successful Literacy Learning

A Comprehensive Whole-School Approach to Prevention and Intervention

Miriam P. Trehearne
Author/Literacy Consultant
(403) 238-5049
miriam.trehearne@telus.net
Miriam P. Trehearne Teacher/Author/Literacy Consultant

Miriam Trehearne has been a classroom teacher, resource teacher, Program Specialist (exceptional needs students) Literacy Coach, Literacy Specialist and University Associate. Miriam's passion is effective and engaging literacy teaching and learning for all students.

As a Literacy Specialist, she led a very successful research-based literacy initiative in a very large urban school district (156 elementary schools) which focused on 56 high-needs schools. The results “closed the literacy gaps” by third grade and have been documented by university researchers and an independent program evaluator.

Miriam presently devotes much of her time to researching literacy best practices, presenting to and working with teachers, paraprofessionals, literacy coaches, school administrators and parents around the world. Miriam also supports individual schools and school districts with effective literacy reform through the development of Literacy Reviews and School/ School District Literacy Action Plans and ongoing professional development including how to effectively implement PLCs to support whole school/district change. As a proud Canadian, her greatest thrill is working with fellow Canadian teachers, administrators, other professionals, paraprofessionals, parents, volunteers and departments of education, coast to coast.

Miriam also continues to write professional books, publish in journals and creates developmentally appropriate and engaging teacher/student literacy resources.

She has published in several professional journals, has authored award-winning student resources and is senior author of The Language Arts Kindergarten Teacher’s Resource Book (Nelson Learning Ltd), the 2006 AEP award-winning Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Grades 1-2 Teachers and The Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Preschool Teachers. The Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Grade 3-6 Teachers was also a finalist for the AEP Award. Miriam has been honoured as a Canada Post Literacy Educator Finalist.

*Learning to Write and Loving It! Preschool-Kindergarten*, Corwin Press, became available August 18, 2011. It was a finalist for the 2011 AEP Award. This book is forwarded by Dr. Timothy Shanahan, former President of the International Reading Association and a member for the Reading Hall of Fame.

Her newest book *Multiple Paths to Literacy Inquiry, Play, Art, Self-Regulation through Intentional Teaching K-2*

*became available in 2016.*
Design Elements of a General Model of School Improvement (Adapted from Hill & Crevola, 1997)


Miriam P. Trehearne, 2015
Effective Early Literacy Instruction

Depends Upon:

- Beliefs
- Time
- Engagement
- Teaching
- Materials
- Balanced Literacy Programs
- Home / School / Community Partnerships
- Early Intervention (K-2)
Balanced Literacy Programs + Early Intervention = Success for All

In May 1998 the Government of Alberta provided funds for school systems to begin an early literacy initiative focussed on children kindergarten through grade 2. The initiative, specifically targets students struggling in learning to read. Of the funding received under this initiative, a minimum of 85 percent must be used to employ additional human resources to support classroom teachers (K-2), and the remaining funding, up to 15 percent may be used for teacher in-service and to purchase early literacy resources. As a result of this initiative Alberta Education expects

• by the time children enter grade 3, they will be able to read well.
• children at risk will get the special help and attention they need so they can learn to read and get a good start on future education success.
• more children will meet the acceptable standards set by the language arts achievement tests at the grade three level.

Why the focus on early literacy and early intervention in Alberta, across Canada, and worldwide?

Rather, the question should be, why has it taken so long for there to be a focus on early literacy and early intervention?

• The research is very clear: Too many adults (more than 20 percent in Canada) are functionally illiterate. (Statistics Canada, 1996)

• In early grades success in school is virtually synonymous with success in reading. In fact, research has shown that a child’s reading level at the end of third grade is a more accurate predictor of school success than any other variable - including family income, educational attainment of parents, ethnic or cultural identity or home language. (Carter, L.F.)

• According to a study by Juel (1988), the 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 is .88. There is a near 90% chance of remaining a poor reader after 3 years of schooling. Juel noted, "Children who did not develop good word recognition skills in first grade began to dislike reading and read considerably less than good readers both in and out of school." (Allington, R., 1998).

• It is estimated that 80 percent of the children who are identified as learning disabled have, as their predominant characteristic a serious problem in learning to read. However, there is an impressive growing body of evidence showing that many of these reading problems, which all too frequently become permanent are preventable, if provided with effective intervention early (kindergarten through third grade). (Pikulski, J., 1998)

• There is very little evidence that programs designed to correct reading problems beyond second grade are successful. (Pikulski, J., 1994) Remediating learning deficits after they are already well-established is extremely difficult. Clearly, the time to provide additional help to children who are at risk of school failure is early on, when they are still motivated and confident or when learning deficits are relatively small and remediable. (Madden, Slavin, et.al., 1991). Thus, the research around the work indicates that the “gap” in reading widens dramatically after first year and is hard to close. In an Australian study it was found that even by third grade, the learning gap was so large that for low achieving students, catching up with their peers (in reading) was virtually impossible. (Hill, Crevola, 1999)

• There is little doubt that failing to learn to read has many disadvantages beyond reading. Poor readers experience problems in many other aspects of education that likely will affect their self-concepts. Reading problems have been linked with emotional problems, school dropout and criminal behavior. (Juliebo, Norman, and Malicky, 1989)
How can school systems most effectively support their at-risk readers?

Research on early intervention suggests that there is no magic bullet, no program that administered for one or two years, will ensure the success of all at-risk students throughout their careers and beyond. (Slavin, et.al., 1993, p.16) To produce substantial and lasting gains, early intervention programs must be supported and followed by high quality literacy curriculum and instruction. (Research Speaks to teachers, Vol. 27, #4) That is, intensive early intervention programs coupled with long-term improvements in curriculum and instruction can prevent school failure for nearly all students. (Slavin, et.al., 1993)

What schools need is a comprehensive early literacy program, which involves balanced literacy instruction (good first teaching), on-going professional development, parent involvement, and early intervention for students at risk. (Pinnell & Fountas, 1996) There will always be some students struggling in early reading even with early intervention, but with improved first teaching there will be fewer students needing intervention. A good school is a collection of good classrooms. Good classrooms have good teachers. (Allington, R., 1997) Thus, on-going development for all K-2 teachers is necessary, proactive work which should help all students to be more successful, earlier.

What effective early literacy instruction looks like:

- **Beliefs** - Teachers’ beliefs are crucial to student success. “Until teachers and administrators believe that all children can become proficient readers and writers it is unlikely that efforts to create extraordinary instructional programs will be sustained.” (Allington, R., 1996) Teachers must also believe that their role is key to reading development and that they can and must create the opportunities. Children are least successful in schools where teachers lack confidence in their own efforts to help children become readers and writers. (Allington, R., 1996)

- **Time** - Across virtually every study of classroom effectiveness in elementary schools, one finding stands out. That is, teachers who allocate more time to reading and language arts are the teachers whose children show the greatest gains in literacy development. (Allington, R., 1996) Long blocks of time are most beneficial.

- **Engagement** - The amount of time students are truly engaged in learning is the most potent predictor of literacy learning. Task difficulty and task interest largely determine engagement (Allington, R., 1996)

- **Teaching** - Students need more structured modeling, demonstrating, and coaching, and less assigning. (Allington, R., 1996) This teaching involves much work with flexible groupings of students based on student need/interest.

- **Materials** - A print-rich environment is crucial. Students need to read a variety of books, representative of many different difficulty levels and genres. Children in classrooms with library centres read about 50% more books than children in classrooms without such centres. (Allington, R., 1996)

- **Balanced Literacy Programs** - such programs involve a wide variety of activities provided consistently. These activities include reading/writing to/for children; reading/writing with children; reading/writing by children; visual literacy; oral language and numerous forms of representing knowledge/understandings.

- **Home/School/Community Partnerships** - When parents, caregivers, and communities support the work of schools, students make greater progress. (Hill, Crevoila, 1999) These partnerships are not always easy to establish or maintain, but are very important.

You never judge a system by those who succeed in it. Those people will likely succeed in any system. You judge it by those it fails. Harold Rosen
Essential elements of effective early reading intervention programs

- Daily (at least 30 minutes) individual or very small group instruction is essential. Some children will definitely require one-to-one tutoring. A verified (proven) model of early intervention should be used.
- Intervention is most profitably focussed on students in first grade.
- Texts for early intervention programs should be interesting engaging and “just right” so that students are successful daily.
- Repeated reading of the same text is crucial.
- Instruction must focus student attention on words, letters, phonemic awareness, phonics, and word patterns.
- Writing is important.
- On-going assessment that monitors student progress and directs instruction is necessary.
- Communication between home/school with daily reading at home is strongly encouraged. Parents must be shown effective strategies to use with their children.
- On-going professional development for intervention teachers is integral to the program. Teachers must know how best to support struggling readers. (Pikulski, J., 1994; Snow, C., et.al., 1998)

Has the early literacy initiative made a difference to Alberta students?

The Initiative has made a difference to many Alberta students but the degree of effectiveness depends upon specific program implementation. To be effective, schools and school systems must base educational decisions on evidence, not simply ideology. (Reading Today, IRA, February/March 2001) Pendulum swings (the latest flavor of the month) can disenfranchise students. A verified model of early intervention (K-2) coupled with ongoing effective first teaching must be used in every classroom. Schools must make literacy the top of the agenda and be relentless in working in this area. Ongoing staff development through workshops, networks, and visiting other classrooms is crucial. Schools involved must adopt a whole-school approach to early literacy. Pockets of excellence do not create effective schools. Parents must be involved and supported. Harold Rosen, former chair of the

Bibliography


Research Speaks to Teachers: Enhancing Early Literacy, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1993.


Robert O'Reilly, in a 1999 article in Education Canada, challenged Canadians to "examine closely" a model to enhance literacy development in young learners developed by Dr. Peter Hill, University of Melbourne. He was unaware that at the time an initiative was already in place in the Calgary Board of Education to replicate the Australian model. Since 1998, Alberta Learning (the Alberta Ministry of Education) has provided yearly funding for the Whole School Approach to Early Literacy: Kindergarten to Grade 2, in 56 high-needs schools, involving approximately 6000 regular class students and 550 students requiring special intervention. The Calgary project, like the Australian project, was titled the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP) and included three components: prevention of reading difficulties, intervention, and research. The Whole School Approach is also being replicated in high-needs schools in Boston, New York, Elgin (Illinois), and most recently in Toronto. The Whole School Approach is a comprehensive literacy initiative that focuses first on good teaching in the regular classroom (K-2 in Calgary) - with effective early intervention for those students who experience difficulty in literacy acquisition despite best teaching practice in the regular classroom; and second on research - not only in the interests of fiscal accountability, but also as a way to study the effect of comprehensive literacy initiatives. In Australia, substantial improvements by students in meeting and exceeding early literacy standards has resulted in a mushrooming of the Whole School Approach from 27 schools in 1995 to an "early years initiative" of 1305 schools in 2001, involving 223,530 students and 18,783 teachers and administrators. More than 1100 of those schools implemented Reading Recovery® as the intervention component for 9000 students who needed one-on-one intervention. The research component of the Calgary program, involving both independent university researchers and a private consultant, has focused not only on the level of achievement for all students in the project, but also on the effect of a variety of factors - relating to students, teachers, site literacy coordinators, principals, school environment and parents - on student achievement. This article will briefly describe the philosophy and principles underpinning the Whole School Approach, outline the literacy program in this Canadian context, present three-year findings in literacy achievement for both regular class and intervention students, and comment on the success of the Whole School Approach to Literacy Development in the Calgary Board of Education.
Philosophy and Principles

The Whole School Approach is a way to change the culture of each school so that teachers, administrators, parents, specialists, and students are all working in synergy to meet high expectations for student achievement.

What elements contribute to improved learning in the Whole School Approach to Early Literacy Development? Hill and Crevola (1998b) write that a commitment to high expectations needs to be reflected in very explicit standards. In addition, to the extent that there are in each school "assessment literate teachers" and assessment becomes part of instruction and part of the teaching culture, teaching for all students should be directed at meeting their specific learning needs.

Other elements contributing to the success of the Whole School Approach include: the organization of each classroom and each school for maximum engagement in learning, with an uninterrupted block of time for teaching/learning the language arts; on-going and system wide professional learning opportunities for teachers and a variety of instructional supports on a continuing basis to enhance their knowledge of literacy processes and best practices; special intervention for learners who continue to experience difficulty despite best practice in the classrooms; strong leadership in each school dedicated to a team approach to literacy development, and a partnership between the home and school in the continual literacy development of children.

The School/System Program

In the Calgary Board of Education, the Literacy Specialist and her team incorporated these principles into an operational program supporting the Whole School Approach to Literacy Development. They developed the program, conducted or arranged for system-wide professional development with site coordinators, and a variety of instructional supports and regular meetings and additional professional development occurred at the school level.

The 56 schools that "came on board" applied to participate in the ELRP, indicating the intervention program of their choice: Reading Recovery (RR); a modified program called Early Reading Intervention (ERI); or a site-based program proposed by individual schools. Each school signed a letter of commitment to abide by the basic principles in the program. Twenty-four schools chose RR, 30 chose ERI and 2 schools each proposed a site-based program. In accordance with the Whole School Approach, each school committed to meeting the following requirements:

- allocating a minimum of 2 hours uninterrupted time per day to language arts in individual and small group settings;
Reading with level in June, 2001-2002. Furthermore Alberta Learning noted with interest the improvement in all students' literacy achievement in the 56 high-risk schools on the 2001 Grade 3 Provincial English Language Arts Achievement Test, as well as an individually administered informal reading inventory, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Since the results on the DRA correlated highly with the CTBS results \( r = .82 \) in 1999-2000, \( r = .61 \) in 2000-2001, and \( r = .77 \) in 2001-2002, DRA results are not reported here.

In all 56 high-needs schools, one-on-one or small group instruction, improvement in classroom instruction, teacher professional development, and school improvement were systematically linked.

Regular class students

The CTBS results of regular classroom students are presented here in terms of the students' ability to achieve acceptable grade level standards in reading according to CTBS norms.

For regular classroom Grade 1 students, year-end CTBS results continued to show consistent improvement in each year of the three years of ELP. In 1999-2000, 88.8% of the Grade 1 students were reading at or beyond grade level at year end. As the end of 2000-2001, 89.6% of the Grade 1 students were reading at or beyond grade level, with 17.7% reading at or above the Grade 2 level. In 2001-2002, 92.8% of the Grade 1 students were reading at grade level or beyond, with 16.3% already reading at or above the Grade 2 level at year end. These results show a consistent pattern of growth in reading achievement on the CTBS every year the program was in place for Grade 1 students.

While the Grade 2 results for all regular classroom students on the year end CTBS are not nearly as dramatic as the Grade 1 results, they show that 80.0% of Grade 2 students were reading at a Grade 2 level or beyond at the end of 1999-2000 (with 12.0% of these students reading at or above the Grade 3 level), 81.7% at the end of 2000-2001, and 82.7% at the end of 2001-2002 (with 14.4% of these students reading at or above the Grade 3 level in June, 2000-2001).

Furthermore Alberta Learning noted with interest the improvement in all students' literacy achievement in the 56 high-risk schools on the 2001 Grade 3 Provincial English Language Arts Achievemen1 Test, a test that is administered yearly in June. The Results

The results have been most encouraging. As part of the ELP, Grade 1 and 2 students were administered the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) (2000) word attack, passage comprehension and story reading at the end of Grade 1, passage comprehension and story reading at the end of Grade 2 and a standardized group test, as well as an individually administered informal reading inventory, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The results of the intervention students correlated highly with the CTBS results \( r = .82 \) in 1999-2000, \( r = .61 \) in 2000-2001, and \( r = .77 \) in 2001-2002.

Intervention Students

The results of the intervention students are presented in terms of the students' ability to meet Alberta Learning grade level standards by the end of the school year.

For children identified as needing assistance beyond that provided in the regular classroom, RR trained teachers provided on-site literacy intervention or, in the case of ERI, a modified type of intervention program, generally in small groups. Thus, in all 56 high-needs schools, one-on-one or small group instruction, improvement in classroom instruction, teacher professional development, and school improvement were systematically linked.

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At the beginning of each of the school years (1999-2002), students who were identified by their teachers as having limited or no comprehension (based on Alberta Learning reading levels) were assessed on a battery of tests to determine their needs and were provided with either Reading Recovery (a one-on-one program) or Early Reading Intervention (one-on-one or in small group intervention) program. We found that, on average, fewer than 3% of the Grade 1 and 12% of the Grade 2 intervention students were at (or approaching) an acceptable standard in reading at the beginning of the year. By the 1999-2000 year end, 69.9% of the
Grade 1 students receiving RR met the acceptable standard of achievement in reading, and 12.9% were approaching it (for a total of 82.8%). With respect to students receiving ERI, 37.6% of Grade 1 students met the acceptable standard, and 32.1% approached it, for a total of 69.7%. In Grade 2, 41.0% of the students receiving ERI (there is no RR for Grade 2) met the acceptable standard, with 36.5% approaching it (for a total of 77.5%).

In the second year of the project (2000-2001), children in all intervention programs continued to make measurable gains on the CTBS. In 2000-2001, 67.7% of Grade 1 RR students and 43.6% of the ERI students achieved an acceptable grade level standard and beyond. Fifty-five percent (55.2%) of Grade 2 students receiving ERI also achieved acceptable Alberta Learning grade level standards in reading in that school term.

In 2001-2002, the final year of the project, a similar pattern of gains by each type of intervention by grade was evident: 60.7% of Grade 1 students receiving RR and 54.5% receiving ERI achieved Alberta Learning grade levels in reading by the end of that school year. Further, 43.4% of Grade 2 students attained Grade 2 level standards according to Alberta Learning's criteria.

We consider it significant that, in 2001-2002, students receiving ERI were approaching achievement levels similar to those receiving RR intervention. This effect may be due to the fact that several former RR teachers were now providing ERI instruction to students, and two new RR teacher leaders were training the RR teachers. This combination of circumstances may have increased the results in one group of students while depressing them in another.

Final Comments

Qualitative data from students, teachers, parents, site literacy coordinators and principals overwhelmingly support the quantitative findings reported.

"Students have been exposed to rich intentional teaching, and there has been a cultural shift in our school."

Principal

"My child was unable to read at the beginning of Grade 1 and is now reading above grade level and more fluently than my child in Grade 3."

Parent of Regular Class Student

"I understand the importance of intentional teaching and differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs in my small groups during literacy time. I know how to use a strategic approach to strengthen the children's use of reading and writing strategies they already know." - Reading Recovery teacher

"I am so thankful that our son was able to access such high quality one-on-one instruction so early on - before the gap in his learning was noticeable to him and before it became an insurmountable hurdle. I remember him coming home and talking about helping others with reading. He saw himself as a reader and I know we have reached a milestone in his journey to literacy." - Parent of Student Receiving RR Intervention

"I can read and spell words better: I can read charts and write stories better: I can read longer chapter books." - Grade 1 Students

"The ELP has made an incredible difference in all areas (reading abilities, academics, behavior, parent knowledge, and motivation), and it can only get better." - Site Literacy Coordinator

"This program has proven invaluable to our school. We are beginning to see the results of our work in students' communication skills and provincial exam results. The extra teacher is crucial to the successful operation of the Whole School Approach. The resources provided are essential and we see an on-going need for more."

Site Literacy Coordinator

"The opportunity for in-service has extended my understanding, knowledge and skills. Because of what I have learned, I have a better understanding of teaching and learning. I am more focused and purposeful in the kind of conversations that I have with children." - Gr.1/2 Teacher

In 1999, at the conclusion of his discussion to the Whole School Approach to literacy development in Australia, Bob O'Reilly (1999) wrote, "It is a model that Canadians should consider seriously." Based on our data from this three-year study, which shows remarkable success in student literacy achievement, an overwhelming change in school culture, and noticeable growth in teacher professional development, we can rephrase his words to say, "It is a model that Canadians should consider seriously."
Calgary Early Literacy Research Project
Guidelines

• a minimum of 2 hours and 15 minutes of Language Arts instruction daily (Grades 1-2) – at least two hours to be in one time block

• incorporation of balanced literacy program

• small flexible groupings as main component of Language Arts block

• strong literacy trust in Kindergarten

• site literacy coordinator per school (.5 -1.0)

• early intervention approach (either Early Reading Intervention or Reading Recovery™)

• consistent small group (2-6 students) support for at risk students not receiving a form of early intervention

• at least twice monthly PLC literacy meetings

• home-school links improved

• use of suitable books for students including multiple copies for Guided Reading

• use of baseline assessment instruments – data to be reported to university three times a year

• additional on-going assessment and record-keeping for all students receiving early intervention

• attendance of Reading Recovery™ and site literacy coordinator and K-2 teacher teams and principals at on-going staff development sessions

• involvement in Early Literacy Research Project with university
Across North America there is presently a great focus by educators, administrators, school districts, departments of education, parents and politicians on “closing the literacy achievement gap.” But in reality there is not one literacy achievement gap but three: the gap that exits between schools, the gap that exits within classrooms, and the gap that exits within schools.

The Between-School Gap: Year after year gaps most noticeably appear among schools representing different socioeconomic patterns. The good news is that research indicates that in effective schools (which involve a great deal of teamwork) these gaps need not exist.

The Within-Classroom Gap: Within classrooms there generally appears a large gap from the lowest to highest achieving student. In third grade, for example, the gap from the weakest reader to the strongest is, on average, five years or grade levels. Again, the good news is that with effective classroom instruction, including intervention for those in need, this gap can be significantly reduced.

The Within-School Gap: The largest gap by far is the gap in teacher effectiveness that exists within any one school. Teachers don’t often like to acknowledge this gap, but it is a reality. Just as there are more and less effective doctors and lawyers, there are also more and less effective teachers. Two teachers teaching next door to each other, having the same numbers of students, the same types of students, the same curriculum, the same materials, the same administrator, and the same parent body, vary significantly (40-49 percent) in effectiveness year after year. No wonder some parents describe the assigning of their children to classes as playing Russian roulette. Again, this is not necessary and definitely should not be the case.

How to Close the Gaps
Teachers can’t teach what they don’t know. The primary factors influencing teacher effectiveness are their beliefs and understandings:
- Effective teachers believe in the potential of all students to be effective literacy learners. Excuses are not made nor are students blamed for not achieving.
- Effective teachers believe in themselves as successful literacy teachers. They are constantly learning and open to new ideas but do not jump on bandwagons.
- Effective teachers believe in the importance of what they are teaching. They recognize the importance of literacy learning as foundational knowledge.
across the curriculum. This is reflected in both the time and effort put into their teaching.

- Effective teachers have clear understandings as to what developmentally appropriate teaching and learning looks like. Students’ results speak for themselves.

The most effective way to support teacher beliefs and understanding (as well as student achievement) is through ongoing professional development by establishing professional learning teams.

**A Professional Learning Team Defined**

In this case, professional learning teams consist of all individuals who work in support of literacy teaching and learning. Team members generally include classroom teachers, administrators, resource/intervention teachers, coaches, teacher librarians, ELL/ESL teachers, and paraprofessionals.

Professional learning communities involve teams that provide a model of ongoing professional development by:

- Uniting under a common purpose, shared vision, collective commitments, and specific measurable goals.
- Engaging in action research into effective teaching and learning.
- Gathering evidence of student learning as a constant focus (focus on results, not intentions). The team is committed to continuous improvement.

Teachers learn from teachers as they work together and plan together. They also need time to visit each other’s classrooms and attend networking meetings, district-level sessions, conferences, and team meetings. It is important for teachers who attend a conference or networking session individually to have the opportunity to reflect and share with the team and perhaps implement a new practice and discuss the results. Mentors and coaches (often referred to as site coordinators and lead teachers) are instrumental in working with teachers to model effective practice, discuss teaching and learning, and provide ongoing feedback and support.

**The Role of the Principal**

The principal is a key player in establishing and maintaining professional learning communities. This begins with articulating the vision and establishing high expectations for students and staff. Effective principals provide both pressure and support. They pay more than lip service to the concept of professional learning through active involvement in both classrooms and team meetings. Shared leadership is also supported through literacy site coordinators or lead teachers, mentors, or coaches. Principals must have the perseverance of the long-distance runner!

**Making Team Meetings Work**

Regularly held team meetings coupled with in-class mentoring/coaching are at the heart of improved teaching and learning. Before holding the first team meeting, it is important to complete a needs assessment that will guide the
meetings’ focus. Through a needs assessment the gaps are identified and then placed in priority order for action and resolution.

A team meeting, held at least twice a month, is not the same as a staff meeting. A staff meeting often deals with administrative items. The team meeting is purely focused on literacy teaching and learning:
- The real reason to meet revolves around improved student literacy learning.
- The meeting is directed by teachers. The lead teacher may facilitate the meetings (after the meeting rules have been established by the team), but the agenda is created collaboratively by the team.
- The focus is generally on specific student(s), through case studies. Student work samples (e.g. writing samples, running records) are often shared (See www.lasw.org).
- Assessment is then tied to instruction as the group discusses the implications for teaching and learning. Discussion prompts may include: What do the students need to learn to do better? What specific knowledge or instructional skills do we need in order to address student achievement in this focus area? How will we acquire this knowledge and skill? How will we know if we have achieved our goal? Where might you go next when working with that particular student?
- The meeting encourages teacher trust through the use of classroom videos. When teachers view each other in action (by watching a video) it is helpful for the viewers to focus on the students rather than the teacher. What the students are doing (or not doing) is most revealing. Possible focus statements for video viewing: What were the things the children were able to do? What was the purpose of the lesson? What was the balance of teacher/student talk? What was the nature of teacher/student talk? Reflect on student engagement/time on task. Was the right amount of time being spent on ________? What did you learn that will help your own teaching?
- Book and journal studies also work well.
- Focus on one topic (e.g. reading comprehension or writing) for a considerable time (e.g. five months). By sticking to one topic, learning can go deeper over time. Participants can try strategies and then return to the group to problem solve and to celebrate.
- Focus on assessment data, school or grade trends, and linking assessment to instruction.
- Hold team meetings in each others’ classrooms to stimulate more discussion and learning.
- End each session by documenting the meeting and planning as a group where to go next. Include who is responsible for what and the timelines.

The Benefits of Professional Learning Teams
No teacher, beginning or experienced, can be expected to grow professionally if isolated. Professional development includes not only formal meetings and courses, but also opportunities for teachers to work with each other and visit classrooms.

The following elements of effective professional development reflect effective learning teams: reflection/dialogue on practice; implementation of new
teaching strategies; use of relevant data to inform deliberations; sustained focus on a topic of study; participant control over group procedures and content, ensuring that all viewpoints are valued; and time for teachers to study together (The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, CIERA 2001).

Miriam Trehearne is on leave from her Canadian school district where she led a successful early literacy initiative involving professional learning teams. She is presently working as an international literacy consultant, speaking in Canada, the U.S., and Europe and has authored numerous journal articles and several professional books for teachers, including The Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Preschool Teachers (2004) and The Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Kindergarten Teachers (2003), [ETA Cuisenaire]. The Grades 1-2 sequel will be available in February 2005.  Source: Today's School, January/February 2005
THE SIX *T*S ....
OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

- TIME
- TEXTS
- TASKS
- TALK
- TEACH
- TEST

Allington 2006
Five Missing Pillars of Scientific Reading Instruction
– Richard L. Allington, Ph.D., University of Tennessee, USA –

In the U.S., the National Reading Panel report (2001) set forth five pillars of scientific reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. There is little disagreement these are critical aspects of reading acquisition. But even the NRP listed a number of areas of research that they felt deserved review (but that did not have the time or funding to do). Below is my list of five additional pillars of scientific reading instruction based on the available evidence concerning what really matters for learning to read. Each of these five pillars seems absolutely essential elements of “scientific’ reading instruction. I provide citations for recent papers pointing to the scientific evidence supporting these additional pillars.

1. **Access to interesting texts and choice.** Kids need easy access to a large supply of texts they can read and are interested in reading. Guthrie and Humenick (below) completed a meta-analysis on a number of studies of classroom reading instruction and found that when classroom environments provided lots of interesting and appropriate texts the impact on reading achievement was three times greater than the National Reading Panel found for providing systematic phonics instruction.


2. **Matching kids with appropriate texts.** Kids cannot learn much from texts they cannot read. They cannot learn to read from difficult texts. They cannot learn science or social studies from difficult texts. The first step in planning effective instruction is finding texts that match the reading level and conceptual levels of the students you will be teaching. While many classrooms provide a large supply of grade level texts that are appropriate for normally developing readers in too many classrooms there is scant supply of off-level texts for struggling readers. Struggling readers need appropriately difficult books in their hands all day long.


3. **Writing and reading have reciprocal positive effects.** The more effective curriculum plan ensures that reading and writing, composing and comprehension, decoding and spelling lessons are well-linked so as to take advantage of the natural reciprocity between the various reading and language processes. Less effective curriculum plans create lessons where decoding and spelling are separate lessons, where writing activities have no relationship to reading activities. Such curriculum plans ensure that the natural reciprocity will not be tapped.


4. **Classroom organization: Balance whole class teaching with small group and side-by-side instruction.** Whole class instruction is simply unscientific. Children differ and effective classroom reading instruction provides a balanced mixture of whole class, small group, and side-by-side instruction all day long.


5. **Availability of expert tutoring.** Some students simply need more intensive and more expert instruction if they are to maintain a pace of development that is comparable to their peers. Ensuring that such children have access to expert tutoring is essential if no child is to be left behind. Further, there exists little evidence supporting interventions where the instructional group is larger than 5 students. While tutoring is the most powerful design, expert very small group (n= 2-3) instruction will be sufficient to accelerate the development of many struggling readers.


Presented at the National Reading Conference, Los Angeles, December 2006.
Ten principles for looking at reading lessons

@ R. L. ALLINGTON, 2004

1. **Nothing is better than reading and writing to develop students’ reading and writing.**
   Do kids read for at least one hour each school day? Do kids write for at least one-half hour each day? Do most kids read at home evenings, weekends and over the summer?

2. **Most reading should be easy reading (high accuracy/good comprehension).** An 80/20 ratio (easy to harder) seems about right. Do all students have texts of appropriate complexity? Is most reading high success reading? Across day? Do they choose some of the books they read in school?

3. **Students do not develop comprehension strategies by answering questions after reading.** Are active comprehension strategies explicitly modeled on a daily basis? In content subjects as well as reading sessions? Is literate conversation modeled? Do students write daily to foster understanding?

4. **Students do not develop composing strategies from red ink corrections (nor from just writing).** Are composing strategies explicitly modeled in front of students on a regular basis?

5. **Students do not develop decoding strategies from drills or dittoes (nor from just reading).** Are useful decoding strategies explicitly modeled on a regular basis? Is decoding instruction linked to spelling/composing? Is daily coaching of decoding strategies in context offered?

6. **Students benefit from an integrated, content-oriented reading/language arts curriculum.** Are the interrelationships between the language arts obvious in the curriculum students experience each, day, each week, each year? For instance, is the decoding strand linked to the spelling/composing strand? The composition strand to the comprehension strand? Do each day’s instructional activities exhibit linkages? Do students learn useful content during their reading lessons?

7. **Some students need access to larger amounts of more intensive expert instructional support and enhanced opportunities to read and write with instructional support.** Do lower-achieving students (e.g. Title 1, learning disabled) participate in instructional support efforts that substantially increase the amount of reading and writing they do each day? Are most instructional groups restricted to 2-3 students? Is expert instruction provided? Is personalized instruction provided?

8. **Thoughtful literacy is the new goal for reading and language arts instruction.** Basic literacy/minimum competence will no longer suffice. Do daily school assignments emphasize summarizing, organizing, synthesizing, comparing, analyzing, creating, and presenting texts? Is discussion of texts a daily event? Are students asked to make connections between texts they have read?

9. **Developing independent, engaged readers and writers is critical to developing thoughtful, lifelong learners. Easy access to books is critical support for fostering independent reading activity.** Do classrooms have large and enticing supplies of books and magazines nicely displayed and available to read at school and home? Are there many texts that can be read successfully by the lowest-achieving students? Is the school library open weekends and summers?

10. **Access to consistently high-quality classroom instruction is more important than the sort of parents students have or the special programs they attend.** Good classroom instruction is absolutely central to student achievement. Do not expect either parents or special programs to solve students’ literacy learning problems. Is every classroom providing all students with appropriate instruction?
A comprehensive needs assessment is a systematic effort to acquire an accurate, thorough picture of strengths and weaknesses of a school community, thus identifying the needs of the students in the school.

1. A **need** is the gap between what is and what should be.
2. A needs assessment is defined as the formal identification of the gaps, the placement of the gaps in priority order, and the selection of the gaps in highest priority for action and resolution.

**Complete this grid to get a snapshot picture of program needs.**

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*Adapted from: Leadership for Literacy-A Guidebook for School-Based Planning. Reading Recovery™ Council of North America. 1996*
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