

Literacy Solution
Grades K-3



Read Well Research Foundation

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Introduction

To be successful and compete in a global economy in the 21st century, students must be not only literate, but also capable of analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, and drawing cogent conclusions about written material independently, which will lead them to become productive problem solvers. The first step toward equipping students with the necessary prerequisite skills begins early in their education with a comprehensive, evidence-based literacy program and quality instruction. Laying a solid foundation in early literacy skills is important because of the increasing academic rigor students will encounter in subsequent grades. Their successful progress toward high school graduation and beyond will be dependent on this foundation.

Constructing a proper foundation early in a student's education means time in middle and high school can be spent expanding the crucial skills of analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, and concluding. If the foundation is not properly set from kindergarten through third grade, crucial learning time in middle or high school must be given over to intervention instead of furthering rigorous studies. In other words, students must catch up on foundational skills that should have already been learned, rather than moving ahead, expanding their vocabulary and acquiring more knowledge about the topics under discussion and the world around them.

Read Well® is a comprehensive, evidence-based literacy program that sets this critical foundation while enabling teachers to differentiate student needs, assess proficiently and individually, and provide instruction to meet the individual needs of all students. *Read Well* provides explicit and systematic instruction in key literacy skills to ensure students read fluently from the beginning of their education. Instruction is presented in whole-class and small-group configurations in all areas of literacy: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

This report will identify best practices from research that have been incorporated into the *Read Well* program. The components discussed include phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Additional discussion will cover: lesson design; screening, assessment, and differentiation; writing; and student motivation.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

When students become aware that words are constructed of smaller units of sound and that these units can be manipulated and changed, they are developing phonological awareness (Moats, 2000). Phonemes are the individual units of sound that compose a word. A phoneme is made up of one or more letters. Thus, the words *the* and *he* each consist of two phonemes, or sounds, (*th + e* and *h + e*) even though they have different quantities of letters. "Phonemic awareness (PA) involves teaching children to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken syllables and words" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 7). In the early stages of learning to read, PA is critical to a student's success (Cunningham, 2011). Phonemic awareness involves, among other things, being able to hear the different sounds in a word, recognize rhyming words, and identify letters as well as make some letter-sound connections. The National Reading Panel found that "teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to PA" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 7). The panel also found that systematic and explicit instruction in small groups that focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation is the most effective way to teach PA. As will become apparent, phonemic awareness is only one part of a balanced early literacy program.

Read Well is structured around a specific sound sequence that: (1) introduces high-utility sounds before low-utility sounds and (2) separates easily confused sounds. Students in *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1* usually learn one new sound from the sound sequence in each unit. Most phonemic awareness activities have accompanying cards and posters that guide students to make a connection between the sounds they hear and the letter or letters that make that sound. In the levels for second and third grades, when students are adept at recognizing high-utility sounds, the focus switches to lower-utility sounds. *Read Well* uses explicit instruction and multiple approaches to teach students to recognize, think about, and work with the new sounds. Phonemic awareness instruction easily flows into phonics instruction.

The *Read Well* curriculum

- includes chants, songs, and poems that introduce new sounds, and reinforce sound familiarity, making it rich in oral language;
- helps students hear and isolate beginning, middle, and ending sounds;
- provides segmentation and sound counting instruction and practice (orally, through finger counting, and/or by following visual cues on blending cards); and
- provides sound blending instruction and practice (orally, through hand movements, by using manipulatives, and/or by following visual cues on blending cards).

Alphabetic Principle and Phonics

Beginning readers must understand the alphabetic principle, the link between the sounds of words (phonemes) and their abstract representations (graphemes, or letters). Phonics involves not only the sounds made by a letter or letters, but also word-reading instruction; students must learn to blend the sounds into words. Phonics is the first tool to be placed into a student's bag of word-reading strategies.

In a key study, first- and second-grade students who received explicit phonics instruction performed significantly better on measures of reading achievement than students who received an implicit or embedded approach (Foorman, Fletcher, Francis, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998). Chard, Simmons, and Kame'enui (1998) explain these results by stating that the implicit or indirect approaches to phonics instruction place too much responsibility on the learner to isolate the letter-sound correspondence being taught from the other letters in proximity. Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn (2001) say "a program of systematic phonics instruction clearly identifies a carefully selected and useful set of letter-sound relationships and then organizes the introduction of these relationships into a logical instructional sequence" (p. 16).

Research shows young children benefit from learning phonemic and phonics concepts through systematic phonics instruction in kindergarten and first grade (National Reading Panel, 2000; Cunningham, 2011). This is true even for children who may have a considerable bank of words as part of their oral language vocabulary because they are often unable to recognize those words when they encounter them in print. But, as children progress through elementary school and encounter more complex words, they need more strategies to decode multisyllabic words. Therefore, after learning basic sounds, students should master four other approaches for learning to read words: sequential decoding, analogy, contextual analysis, and sight-word recognition (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). Sequential decoding is the traditional approach of sounding out a word, as in "/k/ /a/ /t/, cat." Analogy focuses on looking at word families through recognition of onset and rime: cat, sat, mat, fat, and rat. Contextual analysis involves simply analyzing an unfamiliar word using sounds, familiar word parts, context within the sentence, and such. Sight-word recognition builds a student's lexicon with words that defy the pronunciation "rules." Through repeated exposures, students are taught to recognize the whole word by sight. Effective reading instruction uses decodable text in the early grades (e.g., student reading materials that contain a high percentage of words with regular decodable spelling patterns). In addition, "Successful reading at the intermediate grades requires children to have strategies for decoding multisyllabic words" (Cunningham, 2011, p. 200). This is important because Cunningham (1998) found that "many big words occur infrequently, but when they do occur they carry much of the meaning and content of what is being read" (p. 189). Therefore, it is important for students to be able to decode multisyllabic words when they are encountered in text.

Another important aspect of phonics instruction is encoding, or spelling. The positive role that encoding and spelling instruction play in early reading development is often underappreciated. For this reason, focused and explicit spelling instruction has not been adequately leveraged in most reading curricula. However, "many researchers have shown strong, significant correlations between spelling ability and reading performance . . . and have demonstrated the predictive powers of decoding and spelling performance on future reading and spelling abilities" (Weiser & Mathes, 2011, p. 171).

Phonics instruction in *Read Well* includes letter-sound identification, blending sounds, and recognition of high-utility and irregular words. Students practice phonics skills with words pulled from the text that correspond to the sounds being taught in the Word Work instruction. Then the students read the text and encounter words with the sounds they have just learned. Specifically in *Read Well 3*, students study types of syllables to facilitate their reading of multisyllabic words. Throughout the entire *Read Well* program, students learn to decode unfamiliar words by processing all the letter sounds and sight syllables they have learned. Stahl, Osborn, and Lehr (1990) note that skillful readers process words this way "whether they are reading isolated words or meaningful, connected text" (p. 18). Encoding is a pivotal part of *Read Well*, with the focus set around the progression of systematic and explicit instruction within the continuum of kindergarten to third grade. Encoding is incorporated into *Read Well K* Whole Class and Small Group. *Read Well 1* and *Read Well 2* have stand-alone Spelling and Writing Dictation components, and *Read Well 3* has teacher-directed instruction with dictation of words students will read in the current passage.

Fluency

Fluency is “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (National Reading Panel, 2000, pp. 3–5). The components of fluency include accuracy, automaticity, and prosody (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010). Fluent reading is a characteristic of a reader who is free of the word-identification problems that often hinder comprehension. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) recommend that students “read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 16). Reading fluency is recognized by researchers as an essential element of comprehension (Grabe, 2010; Kuhn, et al., 2010; National Reading Panel, 2000).

Automaticity refers to the rate at which a student reads, but it encompasses more than speed. A child who reads with proper automaticity does not hesitate or stumble over words. Hirsch (2003) explains, “a person who reads fast has ‘automated’ many of the underlying processes involved in reading, and can, therefore, devote conscious attention to textual meaning rather than to the processes themselves” (p. 12).

Prosody is “the pitch, loudness, tempo, and rhythmic patterns of spoken language” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 196). A child reading with good prosody has proper phrasing as well as expression. Though researchers are unclear about the exact nature of the relationship between comprehension and expressive reading, they know the two abilities are linked. Children who comprehend well tend to read with expression. Children who read expressively tend to comprehend well. The CCSS recommend that students “read on-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 16).

“If children do not acquire good word reading skills early in elementary school, they will be cut off from the rich knowledge sources available in print, and this may be particularly unfortunate for children who are already weak in verbal knowledge and ability” (Torgesen, 2000, p. 58). Kuhn, et al. (2010) notes that “in addition to developing automatic word recognition, repeated readings allow learners to establish prosody, identify appropriate phrasing, and determine meaning” (p. 233). Students must go beyond accurate word calling to reading with fluency in order to gain meaning from the text. Without it, good comprehension will elude them.

Read Well moves students from decoding sounds in a word to reading multisyllabic words with automaticity. This is accomplished through instruction in recognizing word parts and chunking those parts into words. The first step in this process is for students to use decoding skills to flex vowel sounds. Then, students build a bank of sight syllables that helps them read unfamiliar words by chunking words into syllables rather than reading each sound individually. Students also study the six most common types of syllables in the English language. Learning these syllable types and the rules that govern them greatly improves automaticity with unfamiliar words.

Fluency lessons occur at least once per unit. These lessons include practice that allows students to develop accuracy and prosody in reading text. *Read Well* students build fluency gradually through repeated readings. A variety of reading activities give the students enjoyable practice in oral reading. These include Duet Stories, Solo Stories, Partner Reading, and Turn Reading. Combining these oral reading skills within the context of vocabulary and comprehension instruction is the next step in a move to reading with fluency.

Vocabulary

There is consensus within the scientific community that vocabulary instruction leads to gains in comprehension (Baumann & Kame’enui, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000; Stahl, 2003). Vocabulary development is significantly enhanced by the amount and variety of text to which young readers are exposed. It is agreed among researchers that trade books are a good resource from which to identify vocabulary words to teach to young learners. Trade books typically provide challenging concepts and higher-level vocabulary necessary for comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2005; Brett, Rothlein, & Hurley, 1996; Coyne, Simmons, Kame’enui, & Stoolmiller, 2004; Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Sobolak, 2011; Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

Insufficient vocabulary knowledge is often a primary factor in students losing ground as they move through the intermediate grades. It is critical for good vocabulary instruction to not only present students with lists of words, but also give them the tools necessary to learn unfamiliar words and understand the ways that words work. The National Reading Panel (2000) recommended that vocabulary be provided through direct instruction; repetition and multiple exposures; learning in rich contexts; and active student engagement in learning tasks. After reviewing research on vocabulary, Baumann and Kame’enui (1991) concluded that words should be used many times in many different situations. Similarly, Stahl (2003) explained that “as we encounter a word repeatedly, more and more information accumulates about that word until we have a vague notion of what it ‘means.’ As we get more information, we are able to define that word” (p. 18).

Rich unit themes in *Read Well*, provided in both whole class and small group instruction with trade books, popular literature, and engaging passages, make it easy for students to learn and recall new vocabulary. *Read Well* builds vocabulary and background knowledge by having students examine and revisit the meanings and uses of words throughout the program. Small-group activities introduce vocabulary words prior to reading the story. Activities practiced before reading the text require students to think about the meaning of the word rather than simply memorize it. The words are then read in the story, and attention is drawn to each word and its meaning.

Teacher-read text in Storybooks, Lap Books, and literature books allows for the exploration of more sophisticated language, which creates greater opportunities for the introduction of new word meanings and a richer content than is normally possible in decodable text alone. *Read Well* features robust vocabulary instruction by combining 7 word study with instruction in the use of vocabulary strategies and word analysis skills. *Read Well* introduces high-utility and content-specific words through direct instruction, followed by active engagement in varied and multiple contexts. Academic vocabulary instruction is embedded throughout lessons at the point of use and revisited across instructional units.

As students progress through the program from *Read Well K* to *Read Well 3*, the vocabulary words increase in complexity. Instruction in *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1* builds students' lexicon of words and sight words, which include high-utility and irregular words. *Read Well 2* continues to add to students' lexicon while also encouraging them to internalize the words they already know. Students in *Read Well 3* continue adding to their lexicon and learn vocabulary strategies for figuring out word meaning during independent reading.

Vocabulary words in *Read Well* are

- read by the teacher in the teacher-read text;
- spoken by the students as teacher-led questions prompt students to use the words orally and in class discussion;
- used repeatedly throughout the unit and often repeated in subsequent units;
- read by the students in decoding practice, activities prior to reading the story, and then in the Storybooks;
- written and practiced in a variety of meaningful activities during independent time; and
- revisited within and across units.

Comprehension

There are many facets to adequate reading comprehension and the skills that enable students to fully comprehend text must be explicitly taught (Almasi & Hart, 2011). If word recognition is slow, the reader's attention remains focused on decoding rather than on gaining meaning from the text (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Once students can accurately decode words in a sentence, they must be able to access the text integration process; that is, make a connection between the meanings of the words. A student, for example, accurately calls words in the sentence "The cat knocked on the door." However, until he/she can integrate the meaning conveyed by all the words, he/she cannot understand that an animal is doing something generally reserved to humans and identify the text as fanciful. Without this understanding, further comprehension of the story containing this sentence will be impeded.

Skilled readers differ from less skilled readers in their use of background knowledge to comprehend text and to draw valid inferences about what they have read (Dickson, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1998). Van den Broek, Kendeou, Lousberg, and Visser (2011) also note that "reading comprehension improves when readers are explicitly taught various strategies such as activating prior knowledge, self-monitoring, summarizing, identifying text structures, and questioning" (p. 261). Current findings indicate that comprehension questions asked during reading are more effective than when asked at the end of reading (van den Broek, et al., 2011). Further, "effective interventions are those that influence readers' actual processes during comprehension, particularly at points where children's comprehension process tends to break down" (van den Broek, et al., 2011, p. 265). The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that "comprehension instruction can effectively motivate and teach readers to learn and to use comprehension strategies that benefit the reader. These comprehension strategies yield increases in measures of near transfer such as recall, question answering and generation, and summarization of texts" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 6).

These three principles have useful implications for improving students' reading comprehension:

1. Fluency allows the mind to focus on comprehension.
2. Breadth of vocabulary increases comprehension and facilitates further learning.
3. Domain knowledge, the most recently understood principle, increases fluency, broadens vocabulary, and enables deeper comprehension. (Hirsch, 2003)

Recent research supports the idea that having students write about the texts they have read also enhances comprehension and their reading ability (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Graham and Hebert recommend having students respond to text in the following ways to enhance comprehension:

- writing personal reactions;
- analyzing and interpreting text;
- writing a summary of a text;
- writing notes about a text; and
- answering questions about a text in writing or creating and answering written questions about a text.

Read Well has an equally strong emphasis on comprehension and explicitly teaching comprehension strategies that students can utilize during independent reading because those "interventions focused solely on decoding and/or fluency were not as successful at enhancing comprehension as interventions that included both decoding and comprehension instruction" (Almasi & Hart, 2011, p. 252). Teacher prompts in the Teacher's Guide build content knowledge and encourage vocabulary development. *Read Well* also prompts teachers to ask questions that direct students to examine the central content of the story during and after reading (Beck, Omanson, & McKeown, 1982), predict what will happen, and identify important story elements. These strategies help prepare students for written story mapping, which increases comprehension (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993).

As students progress from learning to decode to learning to comprehend, *Read Well* presents text with a range of complexity as emphasized in the CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). For example, text in the *Read Well Fluency Foundations™* is designed to be accessible to the low/struggling reader. The text progresses in complexity, including different genres, readabilities, topics, voice, and so on, from *Fluency Foundations* to the Core units. The range of complexity appropriately challenges young readers. Teacher instruction is crafted to guide readers to choose reading strategies appropriate for the text complexity. In other words, students are taught to visualize when reading a narrative or descriptive text. But visualizing usually doesn't help when reading facts related to a timeline of events in history. Therefore, students are equipped to recognize which strategies to use and when to use them.

Read Well includes comprehension objectives that tap the multiple levels of thinking described in Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and other thinking skills models. Students are taught to monitor their own comprehension and be aware of when their understanding begins to wane. Fix-up strategies are effective ways students learn to remedy their comprehension breakdowns. For example, students learn when they should reread and/or read more slowly. Students are also given ample opportunities to reread text and practice their new reading skills before moving on to the next unit.

Comprehension and Skill Work activities in *Read Well* train students to

- preview and make predictions;
- make connections and comparisons;
- enhance comprehension by identifying, describing, asking questions, visualizing, illustrating, classifying, note-taking, summarizing, responding, and evaluating;
- identify and analyze story elements, text features, text structure, and vocabulary;
- practice study and test-taking skills; and
- respond orally and in the form of written work utilizing new vocabulary in complete sentences.

Lesson Design: Teacher-Directed Instruction, Collaborative, and Independent Work

Effective literacy instruction is characterized by an organized classroom featuring evidence-based best practices. These practices include teacher-directed, explicit instruction and opportunities for independent and collaborative work (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). Research supports that students should be provided with explicit and scaffolded instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Gambrell, et al., 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000) and, additionally, in writing instruction (Graham, 2013). The gradual-release model is consistent with explicit instruction (Gambrell, et al., 2011). The first stage of the gradual-release model begins with the teacher modeling and explaining the focus skill; the second stage requires the student to participate with the teacher, while practice is guided and responsibility is shared; the third stage requires the student to assume total responsibility while practicing and applying the newly learned strategy. Scaffolds are gently removed as students demonstrate greater proficiency.

Working cooperatively enhances learning (Jensen, 2005). “Collaborative learning contexts have been found to result in greater student achievement and more positive social, motivational, and attitudinal outcomes for all ages, genders, ethnicities, and social classes than individualized or competitive learning structures” (Gambrell, et. al. 2011, p. 26). Giving students opportunity to discuss text with each other promotes better comprehension. Students’ motivation to read increases when they engage in evaluating text through strategic questioning and activities. This type of collaborative learning also engages higher-order thinking skills. Studies provide evidence for collaboration and collaborative learning (Almasi, McKeown, & Beck, 1996; Almasi, O’Flahavan, & Arya, 2001). It is important to provide substantial time for students to read independently and practice new reading strategies. During independent reading time, students practice the strategies they have been taught so that they can internalize them, thus becoming proficient, independent readers (Gambrell, et al., 2011).

The *Read Well* classroom is composed of both whole-class and small-group instruction. Whole class provides opportunity for all students to access, experience, and be exposed to grade-level expectations. Teacher-directed, small-group instruction follows the principles of explicit and systematic instruction. Each day, students complete a balanced daily lesson. Lessons include instruction in decoding, word work, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. The amount of time on each of these skill sets may be adjusted to meet the needs of the small group. The goal of teacher-directed, small-group instruction is to provide daily, on-level interactions between teacher and students. The teacher uses this time to assess student needs and provide direct instruction that leads to student growth. This time serves as a foundation for both collaborative and independent work.

Read Well’s developmentally appropriate structure ensures that students receive just the right balance between challenging and achievable work. Independent Work typically provides students with an opportunity to successfully read in the context of developmentally appropriate repeated reading, comprehension activities, skill and decoding games, handwriting practice, or the online reading tool, *Ticket to Read*®.

Collaborative Work sessions may include Partner Reading or Group Reading in which the collaborative pair or group reads or rereads the text, allowing students additional exposure to repeated readings. Following this, students may discuss what they have read in a structured environment using Read and Think activities. The Read and Think activities are designed to access higher-order thinking skills, share ideas, and give evidence from the text for such ideas. The collaborative pair or group then completes the activity clarifying their thoughts or discussions.

Screening, Ongoing Progress Assessment, and Differentiation

Effective reading instruction includes efficient screening and ongoing progress assessments to guide decisions about grouping, to monitor the pace of instruction, and to adjust instruction for individuals (Learning First Alliance, 1998). As pointed out by the National Reading Panel (2000), children at all grade levels vary in their skills, particularly in the early grades, and teachers should assess their students and tailor instruction to fit their various needs. “Flexible instructional grouping, accompanied by differentiated instruction and content within and across classrooms is one strategy that may help address the wide range of skills and need for additional materials and instructional strategies to challenge all students” (Firmender, Reis, & Sweeny, 2013, p. 11). Formative assessment, as well as diagnostic teaching, should take place continually as students engage in the learning process (McLaughlin, 2012). Screening and progress assessments enable the teacher to make adjustments, as needed, in grouping or one-on-one instruction.

Read Well offers a variety of entry points based on a student’s pre-screening score. This enables the teacher to group students according to their needs, allowing for differentiation of instruction. Ongoing assessments through Oral Reading Fluency readings and end-of-unit comprehension assessments give the teacher useful data to further evaluate a student’s individual growth and achievement. If necessary, students may be regrouped according to their needs.

Writing

The Writing Study Group of the National Council of Teachers of English (2004) Executive Committee noted that “the act of writing generates ideas” (“Writing is a tool for thinking,” para. 1). Writers may think of what they want to say before putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, but once they begin composition, writing becomes a medium for thought. Therefore, teachers should provide meaningful writing activities along with explicit grammar instruction to equip students with the skills necessary to access this medium. The Writing Standards of the CCSS state “each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 19).

Graham (2013) stressed the importance of foundational writing skills and how they set students in the right direction for writing achievement in the upper grades. These foundational writing skills included: handwriting, spelling, vocabulary development, sentence construction, the writing process, writing strategies, and genre knowledge. “Students must master the knowledge, skills, and processes of effective writers. Teachers should provide direct instruction and modeling for specific writing strategies and processes, and then scaffold learning until students master each strategy on their own” (Graham, 2013, p. 7).

Just as teaching phonics does not teach comprehension, teaching grammar does not teach writing. Children learn to write by writing. Grammar instruction simply provides the tools necessary for students to be able to practice the skill of writing. Writing communicates ideas and is meant to be read. A young student’s academic writing should have an authentic purpose and be used as a vehicle to communicate the student’s thoughts and ideas (Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero, 2011). A variety of opportunities for authentic writing can be created in the classroom. Morrow, et al. suggest writing notes and letters that are actually mailed, sharing recipes, or writing stories and poems to read aloud. Writing should not be limited to only creative writing. Bromley (2011) suggested that even first and second grade students can immerse themselves in a genre, such as informational text, and learn to write in that format.

Graham (2013) recommends that writing skills be explicitly taught, as well as writing processes and strategies. Using the writing process, students should be systematically and explicitly taught how to generate and organize their ideas for writing. Scaffolded instruction in the writing process will enable even young writers to draft, revise, and edit in order to tackle any kind of genre writing without being overwhelmed by the task. The publishing stage of the writing process brings authenticity to the young authors’ writing as they share their finished piece with an audience of some kind.

Graham and Herbert (2010) indicate writing is also an excellent tool to evaluate comprehension. When students write about the main idea of a text or write a summary, as opposed to choosing the correct answer in a test-formatted question, they are writing to learn and internalizing comprehension skills. Because the act of writing takes more effort and thinking than the act of speaking, writing forces a student to be more thoughtful in a written response to reading. Graham and Herbert reported “evidence shows that having students write about the material they read does enhance their reading abilities” (p. 13).

The Composition/Spelling and Writing Conventions of the *Read Well* Composition program begin with fluency of handwriting, introduction and firming of skills, and then moves into composition. Students are supported with mentor text, quality literature, or nonfiction text. Students learn to evaluate their own writing by evaluating samples and identifying strengths and weaknesses of the writing samples. The writing process is explicitly taught and carefully scaffolded so that students are given small chunks of writing tasks. Even when they are writing an imaginative narrative, such as a mystery, or a research report, they are not overwhelmed by the project. Specific writing forms are introduced and practiced. Whether they are planning an informational piece or writing on demand, students easily tackle the assignment using the steps of the writing process because they receive adequate practice throughout the program.

Student-authors develop self-confidence in their writing and oral presentation skills as they share what they have written with the class. The audiences vary as students share their finished compositions in a variety of fun ways. These “celebrations” of writing empower students with personal pride in their work as well as further hone their speaking and listening skills when they read to a larger audience.

A recursive feature in all levels of the *Read Well* Composition program is the correlation between the source text and what students write. *Read Well* gives students many opportunities to write about what they have read or heard. Strategic write-in-response-to-reading activities enable students to internalize important comprehension skills. Writing is a key component in comprehension as well as composition of the *Read Well* program.

Student Motivation

“Teachers can provide instruction in the most essential literacy skills, but if our students are not intrinsically motivated to read, they will never reach their full literacy potential” (Gambrell, et al., 2011, p. 22). Students must have sufficient decoding and comprehension skills to be successful readers. However, they must also be motivated to choose to read. Cultivating positive expectations about, and experience with, literacy is a critical component of effective reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The motivation should include the “values, beliefs and behaviors surrounding reading” (Guthrie, 2011, p. 177) with key motivations to read including interest, confidence, and dedication (Guthrie, 2011). “Motivation often makes the difference between superficial and shallow learning and learning that is deep and internalized” (Gambrell, et al., 2011, p. 22). Major stumbling blocks to skilled reading include an absence or loss of initial motivation to read or a failure to develop appreciation of the rewards of reading (Snow, et al., 1998).

Reading tasks should advance rather than overwhelm the reader. The reading tasks and activities should be moderately challenging requiring effort on the part of the student but with success (Turner, 1995). Research supports that social interaction and collaboration with peers contributes to and promotes motivation (Turner & Paris, 1995). Children need a great deal of experience with literature, being both active listeners and active participants. The Learning First Alliance (1998) suggests that book reading involve multiple genres, including nonfiction and fiction.

The stories in the *Read Well* Storybooks captivate young children and include multiple genres and text types, including fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, fables, folktales, dramas, and poetry. Children are also exposed to rich, interesting content through the readings for each unit. *Read Well* fosters intrinsic motivation by providing students with many opportunities to experience success in reading. Students read on their own starting with the first Storybook. As students progress through the units, they read well-known trade books. On a daily basis, students learn to systematically sound out words, recognize common word patterns, identify high-utility irregular words, and grow their vocabularies. Students practice skills to mastery and then immediately apply them to reading fully decodable stories in *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1*. Progressing to challenging text that stretches them in *Read Well 2* and *Read Well 3*, students are well equipped with decoding, word analysis, and context skills that enable them to comprehend text with little or no support. Students are taught and encouraged to interact with the text and to discuss and read with one another. Students may collaborate with peers or work independently. Engaging activities also provide students with motivation as they write, draw, discuss, problem-solve, and think critically to complete activities.

Conclusion

As research has shown, elementary students must receive explicit instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, and phonics to be able to read. A scaffolded and explicit approach to teaching fluency and vocabulary leads to students having good comprehension of what they read. Finally, writing about what they read, writing to learn, and writing to communicate broaden students’ comprehension and give them a vehicle to achieve understanding. Paired with proper screening, ongoing progress assessment, and differentiation, *Read Well* provides the teacher with a literacy program that meets all the needs of the students in his or her classroom. *Read Well* uses an evidence-based approach to its curriculum and lesson design and addresses all the attributes of a comprehensive literacy program by stimulating motivation with engaging, accessible text and popular literature. It is designed with multiple entry points for easy differentiation. As a result, every child learns that he or she can read well.

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