

Focus Objectives:

3.1 Title Page: The Current Situation of Reading in Australia

Bartek: The current situation

We are in a situation in Australia which is a little bit hard to believe. We have a situation where researchers in this country are writing letter after letter trying to convince leaders in education that the way we are doing things isn't consistent with research recommendations and it is not achieving the best outcomes for our students.

Australia is not doing that great in our literacy outcomes. In 2011 we participated in our first international measure of literacy, called the PIRLS study. Out of 45 countries, we ranked 27th. We were the lowest of all the English speaking nations indicating that our Year 4's were not doing that well in their reading skills. I think this is a pretty unacceptable outcome. There is clearly a systemic failure going on. Unfortunately what is going wrong to most people who are knowledgeable is pretty obvious.

Jennifer: The Reading Wars

Sometimes it is hard to get people to take on board the message about reading instruction because it is characterised as the war between two different types of reading instruction.

Sometimes that is painted as an ideological debate where whole language is a left wing thing and phonics is a right wing thing.

To me, I don't see it as being a case of right versus left, its right versus wrong.

So there is one way of teaching reading that works better than the others.

That is based on the soundest research evidence we have to date and research base is growing all the time.

Chris: Whole language versus Evidence based

The evidence is the research about what is required to effectively teach reading.

We came through a period of whole language approach where someone assumed that because the child learnt to talk naturally that reading could be developed the same way.

The science or the research tells us that while the brain might be hard wired to talk, it is not hard wired for learning to read. Children actually have to be taught how the code works. To go from speech to print is not a simple process but we do know what it is we need to do.

3.2 The Problems

Title Page: The Research to Practice Gap

Bartek: The research to practice gap

We need as teachers to be experts. We need to have a very deep understanding of how the language works in order to be able to teach it effectively. Above all we need to be very cognisant of the research in the area and to close the research to practice gap - that void in the middle.

Aileen: Put research into practice - take 1

You need the knowledge and you need background.

You need all of the scientific data.

You need all of the educational theories.

You have to take that and you have to put it one on one with children in the classroom.

Every day of the year on every aspect of the curriculum to make it work.

Lorraine: The research to practice gap

There are great researchers in Australia and we have access to researchers from around the world. One of the greatest challenges for teachers, when they are in their classroom, they are not part of that great research.

Unfortunately some teachers will value the opinion of a colleague over what the research is saying.

Research is the only defensible basis for making educational decisions. We need to find a way to make research accessible to teachers.

Title Page: Teacher Training

Jennifer: Teacher training and knowledge

A lot of teachers don't have the knowledge they need in order to implement a really high quality reading program in the early years of school. That is not because they are well-intentioned.

They work very hard, they want to do the right thing but they are not being given those strategies in their teaching degrees.

Even the amount of time that is dedicated to literacy in a primary school teaching degree is really small. You would think if there was one thing a primary school teacher would need to be able to do, it is to teach children how to read. But yet, the priority is just not there in primary teacher education courses.

Brooke: Reflection on teacher training and constructivist approaches

When I went to university, being an early childhood graduate, I was predominantly taught about the constructivist approach to learning - when children learn for themselves. The teacher is the facilitator and will create activities and we would hope that children learn by discovery.

I was taught very little about EI and some might say it was a bit of a dirty word. I was told that EI doesn't have a place in the early childhood setting. Everything should be constructivist.

When I came out as a graduate, I felt highly unprepared to teach things like reading, writing and numeracy effectively. I created a constructivist approach in my classroom. I was really disheartened because the children were not experiencing success. Yeah, the strong kids were developing. Those kids in the middle and the weaker students were experiencing so much difficulty that I went in search of something better.

Julie: Teacher training

It is very individual. There are a lot of teachers, that no matter what your knowledge is, they don't want to know about it. They trust in their university degree, which you should be able to do. Any teacher aware of the NITL, you soon become aware that your teacher preparation was not good enough. That is a message that most teachers are not aware that inquiry went on and what the inquiry found about the teachers' preparation in Australia.

Chris: Teacher training

It would appear our current teacher education systems don't necessarily give teachers the knowledge about how to teach reading systematically and explicitly. Seems to be lacking, if you like,

that evidence based approach to the teaching of reading. Basically, teachers come out not fully prepared to teach reading.

As Louisa Moats said, 'Teaching reading is rocket science'. So if it is rocket science, then teachers need to be taught how to teach reading and they need to be taught how our language system operates.

We can't wait for them to hit schools and then spend two years developing the deep pedagogical content knowledge that they need to teach reading

Title Page: Instructional casualties

Mandy: There are many children struggling with literacy in Australia and every bit of data indicates that there are many, many children who are struggling to acquire strong literacy skills in reading, spelling and in writing.

Mandy: There is a problem with literacy

We know there are a lot of students out there, 52% of 15-19 year olds were identified in the ABS data as not having sufficient literacy skills to engage in a modern workplace. So clearly there is a major problem with literacy.

There is a problem with literacy

Carol: Instructional casualty

They can't read, not because they have dyslexia but because they are an instructional casualty. They have not been taught to read by a method that works for them. Perhaps they are a child that need to be taught by an explicit instruction method and if fact they may have been taught by one of those whole language methods, what I call a glance and guess method.

Mandy: Instructional casualties

Instructional casualties have not had sufficient exposure to strategies in phonemic awareness, phonological awareness and phoneme-grapheme relationship knowledge.

Title Page: The Matthew effect in reading

Jennifer: The Matthew effect in reading

The first 3 years of school are learning to read but from that point on, it is reading to learn. So if you have not got those fundamental literacy skills by year 3 and you start to encounter more complicated reading materials and language, from that point on things then become very difficult.

The gap gets wider. It is the Matthew effect.

Children who are good readers quite early tend to read more because they enjoy reading and they are successful and therefore their skills grow.

Children who struggle with reading and never get the help that they need just plateau so the gap gets bigger over time. The longer you leave it the harder it is to close it.

Greg: Expectations

The first thing I think is expectations in our country are too low for our kids.

There has been a lot of play based learning. going back 5 or 6 years ago, the kids spent a lot of time in the playground.

There was not a lot of explicit teaching going on in phonological awareness and phonics. We turned that around completely. We looked at what does the evidence say in best practice teaching in early childhood.

The evidence is very clear. If you start young, you get the best results.

Over 80% of kids that fall behind never catch up. So our intent was, don't let them fall behind.

3.3 Evidence Based

Title Page: The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy

Bartek: National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy

We are in a situation in our country where we have pretty much ignored the recommendations of 3 major inquiries into the teaching of literacy. There was the American National Reading Panel in 2000, in 2004 Australia conducted a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy and in 2006 there was The Rose Report which was the UK national inquiry. Those 3 inquiries summarised information from thousands of studies and thousands of researchers. They all can to very similar conclusions.

Suze: The national inquiry into the teaching of literacy

I was part of the group of academics that sent the letter to the government about why wasn't Australia implementing evidence based literacy instruction which led to the national inquiry into the teaching of literacy. I was reflecting on this...that was in 2005.

I am not brilliant at maths, but I make that nearly a decade ago.

Lorraine: National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy

This is an inquiry that followed and American inquiry at the same time, a British inquiry was conducted. They all said the same thing. If we are going to teach reading well to children it needs to be explicit, systematic and phonic based. However, that hasn't been taken up by schools to the extent that was the intent of that particular report

Suze: The national inquiry into the teaching of literacy

And here we are a decade later....I don't feel things have changed very much.

Some people will say it has changed, there are some fantastic schools and I have worked with some fantastic teachers and speechies, but it is a local level success. It is very much bottom-up, we still don't seem to see top-down.

We haven't seen fundamental change in teacher education institutions.

We haven't seen fundamental change in government. I don't think there has been a government in power long enough with the ability to make sure these things are implemented.

So this fantastic report sits there, it languishes in the back of people's cupboards, and I don't think its evidence based recommendations have been fully implemented.

3.3 Evidence based methods

Title Page: Evidence based methods

Anne: Evidence based reading benefit all children

The research has given us a really clear understanding as to what children need in order to learn to read. That is all children, not just children with dyslexia. As I said earlier, there is no reason to believe the learning for children with dyslexia should be any different than the learning for children that don't suffer from dyslexia.

In the case of dyslexia, they might need it more intensively, the need to be identified earlier and focused on in a more targeted way.

What we have learned is that basic systematic reading instruction that focuses on teaching children to sound things out, teaching them decoding, teaching them phonological and oral language skills and obviously building their ability to comprehend as well as their ability to decode the words is absolutely something all children will benefit from.

There are always children who will come into a classroom already knowing how to read, those children are just on the other end of that distribution. They find that learning process really easy but they still go through the same learning process.

If we make sure from the outset, all children in all classrooms are receiving that systematic instruction, we will certainly reduce the number of children that we see with severe reading problems down the track.

Genevieve: Evidence based

The interesting thing about reading is that even though reading has been around for a long time, the science of reading has got a long way to go.

The power of evidence based thinking is it can always keep up with science.

You apply the same methodology, the same steps to constantly update your understanding of what the science is telling you. The steps themselves don't change. The science, the knowledge and the data may change but you can always keep up with that.

Julie: Message to teachers

Just keep learning and look for evidence based practice.

Look for stuff that is backed up by evidence that has been published in peer reviewed journals.

Get a bit more science into teaching. Not just anecdotal methods of teaching.

Make sure you find out what really works. Look for the research, the research is critical.

Genevieve: Evidence based treatments

When a new treatment comes up, teachers and clinicians can make the best evidence based decision that they can.

Sometimes that is possible because a number of control trials have been done and some of those trials have been summarised into a systematic review or meta-analysis.

Sometimes it is only one or two trials so they can look at outcomes and make their own decisions.

Sometimes there's no meta-analysis or systematic review, there's no individual studies so we teach people how to use related studies to make a decision on a particular program, and sometimes there is not even that.....

If there is no evidence in support of it you have got to acknowledge to yourself that you are stabbing around in the dark.

Jennifer: Elements of Reading and Instruction

The evidence does show us that there are certain components required for a child to become a successful reader.

They begin with phonemic awareness, being able to hear the sounds in words, then making that connection through phonics, and then vocabulary and comprehension.

Each of those are elements of a reading program. It is not so much a model or a system. Those are the elements that need to be in place and most often taught by explicit methods of reading instruction.

By not expecting a child to pick up what you are trying to teach them but actually provide them with the information that they need.

3.4 Explicit Instruction

Lorraine: Most children really need a direct and explicit approach for learning to read.

Learning to read is not a naturally occurring phenomenon.

We talk... we don't need to be taught how to speak. Speech is something we are programmed for as human beings.

We are not programmed for reading. Reading has to piggy back onto the part of the brain that is programmed for spoken language.

We need to teach it and we need to teach it well.

Jennifer: Explicit instruction

Explicit instruction is the opposite of a constructivist approach where you pose a problem to a child and try to get them to work it out for themselves.

Explicit instruction means you provide the information. You make sure that information is understood and then you make sure the child uses that information in some sort of problem solving.

Lorraine: Elements of EI - Revise

Within an explicit instruction lesson, you start off by introducing the one thing you were going to teach. That can be very challenging for teachers because they are used to teaching lots of things or presenting a series of concepts.

With explicit instruction, you teach one thing and you say up front 'Today we are going to be learning about...This is why we are learning about it'

Then you would preview all the sub-skills required in order to do that particular skill.

In the realm of spelling, you are looking at single sounds, phoneme segmentation, syllabification, short and long vowels....you will need that knowledge in order to be able to do that. you will spend time reviewing that with the children.

Brooke: Elements of Explicit Instruction – Warm Up

What you would have seen today is I began with a warm up. I do that every morning where I take concepts that I have explicitly taught to the children throughout the year and I go over them again to reinforce that knowledge.

To move that knowledge from short term to long term memory - so that the children remember it

There is nothing worse than teaching them something and you never revise it again. 3 weeks later you ask them about it and they have got no idea of what you are talking about.

We constantly revise important pre-requisite literacy skills that I know they need to be successful.

Lorraine: Elements of EI - I Do

Then you say "At the end of the lesson girls and boys, you will be able to do this....' Once you have sold the concept of the lesson then move into your 'I do' component which is where you are modelling the particular rule. You have broken it down into baby steps and you gradually build up the skill level of the children.

Brooke: Elements of Explicit Instruction - We Do

Then we practice it together. We practice what they are going to do together.

So then they feel comfortable. They know exactly what they have to do.

It also enables me to see who might have difficulty learning the concept so I can give them further support.

It also helps children develop their confidence because they know when they go back to their table, they have had all this practice. They can do this by themselves.

Lorraine: Elements of Explicit Instruction - You Do

Once everyone understands the key features of the rule, I will send them back to their desks for a short time so I can confirm in my mind they have grasped that concept.

That shouldn't surprise me as during guided practice we are checking for understanding. I will test children's understanding to make sure they have really got the concept. I will have multiple examples in there.

When the kids go back to their desk, they feel really confident because they only have to do a few examples to show me. It is only a small part of the lesson compared to everything else that you do.

Lorraine:

It is that step by step lesson throughout the term, throughout the year takes children to mastery.

Teachers that teach explicitly will tell you that they learn at the same time because there is nothing like having to teach it to kids well to help you to understand something.

Brooke: Early childhood singing and games as a vehicle for explicit instruction

As I am early childhood trained, I still use everything I know about early childhood... singing, dancing, play, stories. I use that as well as a vehicle to drive the explicit instruction.

I think sometimes people are amazed when they come in because they have this idea that explicit instruction being all the kids sitting at their table and its rote learning.

Then they come in and they see, he these children are having fun and they are learning. The concepts they are learning is amazing. They are working well above their year level. They are enjoying it and they are having fun. And they are moving, and they are singing and it is all of those lovely things that we know about early childhood but I am also explicitly teaching content at the same time.

3.5 Oral Language

Suze: The pillars of reading

Oral language is fundamental to reading.

We talk about a bridge from oracy and literacy.

We talk about moving from having strengths from oral language to a literate language.

Bartek: Oral Language

The other really important area is in aspects of oral language, spoken language skills and comprehension listening type language skills. Those skills form the foundation for the ability to acquire these later decoding skills. Language comprehension is required for reading comprehension.

We know a tremendous amount about what is important.

Suze: Expressive and Receptive language

Language is about the communication system.

Expressive language is the output, being able to use words, grammatical structures, vocabulary and to express myself in a way that you are understanding me.

(There is also social communication, the fact I am looking at you and not turning around which would be very inappropriate.)

The literacy side of that would be writing or spelling.

The input side is the hearing, the listening, the processing and the comprehending or understanding what has been said, that is receptive language.

Oral comprehension and reading comprehension are both fundamentally language comprehension but in a different medium.

Listening comprehension relies on the hearing, the processing and the auditory memory.

Reading comprehension relies on the actual decoding of the word but the act of comprehending the language is basically the same.

3.6 Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Anne: The reading process

All of the evidence suggests language skills and the sounds of language that is most related to reading outcomes for children. More so than their visual skills. For a long time people thought reading was visual but reading is very linguistic. It is very much a language skill.

Brooke: Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability for children to breaking up sounds in the English language.

It is a pre-requisite skill for reading, writing and spelling.

It is important teachers in early childhood years do not dismiss phonological awareness.

That they teach it explicitly and systematically.

Most teachers are not aware of PA or do not teach it well.

Suze: Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term for the sound structure of words.

Words are divided into smaller and smaller pieces.

A word can be divided into little words like cup-board.

It can be divided into syllables like hel-i-copt-er.

It can be divided into onset and rime, like cl-ap, and the smallest bits are phonemes, they are the individual sounds.

Brooke: Segmenting words

You might have also seen me getting children to look a syllables on the drum. That was another example of PA. I want those children to be able to read and write long words, multisyllabic words.

If a child can't break a word into it's syllables, they are going to have trouble spelling it.

Bartek: Phonemic awareness

There is a particular area of language processing that is very important and it is called phonemic awareness. This means understanding the sound structure of language.

Understanding how words are composed of speech sounds.

Understanding how to break those words up into their separate speech sounds.

Understanding how to join the speech sounds back together to comprehend the meaning of a word.

Suze: Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is being aware that words consist of those smallest units of sound so 'clap' is c-l-a-p.

Why is that important?

Because when you want to map between sound and print, when you want to crack the code, you need to be aware that words are made up of those small units of sound.

Brooke: Phonological Awareness

For example, if we looked at the spelling rule today, 'tummy'. What was more important than actually knowing what the letters looked like and knowing how to write them, was being able to hear the sounds.

Being able to hear the 'tummy' is made up off /t/ /u/ /m/ /E/.

Knowing and hearing that /u/ is a short vowel sound.

By being able to discriminate between a long and short vowel sound, they then knew whether they had to double the consonant before they put the 'y'

If they can't discriminate between a short and long vowel sound orally, then they can't put it into writing.

PA, everything is done orally - oral language provides the foundation for us to build all of that great literacy knowledge - reading, writing.

If those children do not have the foundation that underpins is, they are not going to be successful.

3.7 Systematic and Structured Phonics

Anne: The reading process- letter knowledge

The other big predictor of how well children learn to read is their letter knowledge. If you measure a child's letter knowledge at age 3 or 4 -that's a really strong predictor of how well they will go on to learn to read.

Jennifer: Phonics

Phonics is the bridge between spoken language and print.

Phonics is essentially a code breaker.

When a child encounters a word they have not seen before or a word they have not yet become really familiar with, they can see all those different parts of a word, sound it out, put it back together again and be able to read that word successfully.

It means that every child does not have to memorise by heart every single word in the English language. They can 95% of the time work out what it is using phonics and their code breaking skills.

Bartek: Hamburger model of words

Letters are very abstract and strange things. They are weird squiggles that represent sounds in our language.

I like to think of words as hamburgers. When I see kids in my practice for the first time, I will tell them that words are like hamburgers.

The sounds, or phonemes are on one bun. This is the word 'spoon' so the sounds or phonemes are /s/ /p/ /oo/ /n/ and there are 4 of those sounds

Bartek: Hamburger model of words

Down here we have the visual representation of the word 'spoon' with the letters 's' 'p' 'o' 'o' 'n'.

You need to form a connection between the sounds in a word and the way they are represented by letters.

We are not very good at teaching the middle level (graphemes) and we are not very good at teaching the sound level. We are quite good at teaching letters. We focus on letters a lot at school.

Often kids will come to school and they will already know their alphabet but very few will come to school knowing this is an /s/ or this is an /n/.

Jennifer: The importance of phonics

In terms in phonics, which is the bit most schools would get wrong. They say there are teaching phonics but they don't.

There is a specific way of teaching phonics which is more effective than others. Sequential, systematic and explicit are the three things that a good phonics program will be.

That ensures that children do not have any gaps in their knowledge. That there isn't the Swiss cheese problem. That every child has mastered those aspects along the way.

You don't assume they just know something and then find out in Year 3 or halfway through primary school, which is quite often when reading problems occur and become identified.

Decoding Regular Words and Reading Irregular Words

Jodi: Regular, Irregular and High Frequency words

What we want our teachers to know is:

What a regular word is, one that follows the rules of phonology.

What an irregular words is, one that doesn't.

Where did they come from? Well we have to delve into the history of the English language to find those out.

What s a high frequency word? A word that occurs a lot. It could be a regular word. It could be an irregular word.

The teacher has to have that knowledge if they are going to explain to their class how these words came about.

Let alone how are we going to tackle them for both reading and spelling.

Genevieve: Regular word reading

There are words that we call regular words. These are words that follow the letter sound rules.

To read these words, you need to know the letters and you need to know how the letters correspond to sounds. This A would sound like /a/ mostly and this one C would sound like /k/ mostly.

You teach children the letter. You teach children the association between the letters and sounds. You teach them how to blend those letters together.

If you are teaching a child how to use letter-sounds to read a regular word like 'cat', they will see this 'C' and its /k/, they will see 'A' and its /a/, they will see that 'T' and its /t/.

You teach them how to decode the individual letters into the sounds /k/ /a/ /t/ and you have to teach them to blend those together so it produces a word. So /k/ /a/ /t/ blend it together produces 'cat'.

Genevieve: Irregular word reading

A lot of words in our written language aren't regular so they are what we call irregular.

This means that those letters do not correspond to the sound that you would expect it to.

The example we always use is 'yacht'.

If you were to read 'yacht' using the letter-sound phonological decoding phonics approach, you would go /y/ /a/ /c/ /h/ /t/ then you would ask the kids to blend this bunch of sounds together and you get y-a-c-h-t.

What you need to do is as well as equipping them with phonics to allow them to decode the many regular words in our language you also have to equip them with the ability to read a word as a whole by sight from memory to use with those words that don't work out when they apply their phonics.

So they come up with y-a-c-h-t and they go, hang on a minute, that can't be right?

So you have to teach them to read some words by sight.

That's the pairing of the whole written word with the whole spoken word and that is what a lot of people refer to as sight words.

So when it comes to reading words in English, those are the two skills you need to equip children with - phonological decoding and sight word reading (reading whole words by sight).

Spelling Rules and Syllable Types

Angela: Spelling rules

There are rules. There are rules in words.

And if you follow this rule, most of the time that will help you to write a word.

That was quite a big 'ahh' moment for me. I just knew how to write these words but the fact there are so many rules we can follow to write a word. That was big.

Jodi: From oral language to print

Decoding (symbol to sound) and the reverse encoding (sound to symbol).

Just teaching skills in isolation doesn't guarantee that the child will use those skills to decode and this is where the teacher's knowledge of diagraphs, common long vowel sounds in spelling and importantly the structure that is beneath decoding which counts on the 7 syllable types.

So when a teacher is equipped to know how to take oral language to print, we are certainly minimising the difficulties as to why a lot of children struggle. That same teacher has the knowledge to understand it is a code based instruction we are teaching the children.

Lorraine: Syllables

Most teachers would teach syllables which is really interesting because I would say to my students in the first week of uni... 'Every syllable has a..' and wait and hope and very few of them say 'vowel.' Sometimes I work with experienced teachers and they don't know that every syllable has a vowel.

Why is this important?

Because if you want to spell a word and you can isolate the vowel and if you can identify whether it is a short or a long vowel. That tells you something about how to spell the word.

It helps you to make a choice.

Whether to use /a/ or /A/.

The next thing you need to know is where does that diagraph (two letters that go together to make a sound) fall in a word.

You will be able to cue the kids by saying a-y goes at the end of words, a-i goes in the middle of words.

You will build up children's understanding of positional frequency.

Lorraine: Phonology, Morphology and Syllable types

By the time children have a grounding in phonology, they start to realise "Oh my goodness... positional frequency... these letter occur in parts of words. Great knowledge for them in terms of spelling.

Then you can start moving as children are older into morphology, which is the smallest unit of meaning in a word... unknot, unhappy. It helps children to chunk words when they are reading but to work out how to spell.

Then you can get to something like syllable types. A syllable type is a really sophisticated understanding of metalinguistics that all teachers should be having a look at. Teachers that teach well in the upper primary should be looking at syllable types.

Think about the words 'even' and 'ever'. They are very similar but they have different compositions in terms of their syllable types. ev-er versus e-ven. It tells us something about the way the words are spelt - that there is an open and a closed syllable.

Jodi: Syllables - open and closed

Just teaching closed and open syllables is the prerequisite to go on and teach multisyllabic words made up of open and closed syllables.

I teach that to a child within 3 minutes. What do I get back in the next 3 minutes?

An understanding of how to decode open and closed syllables.

With an older child, I can take them into two syllable words made up of an open and closed syllable.

If I teach them an open syllable where the vowel says its name, we look at the word d-o in a different light now.

Not as a high frequency word saying 'do' but as a vowel saying its name /O/ it actually becomes 'do-'.

When I train teachers, they are going, where is Jodi going with this? This is not making sense to me right now?

We need to understand we are talking about an open syllable that you hear in speech. Do- /d/ /O/ open syllable, the vowel can say its name.

Let's introduce a closed syllable. 'nut' /n/ /u/ /t/. The vowel is now short. Why is it short? The syllable is closed.

We speak in syllables. Why am I teaching this?

If I have an older child who has no idea about what an open or closed syllable is, I need to look after self esteem.

If I teach them d-o- is an open syllable and n-u-t is a closed syllable, I can put those two words together and they have the skills now to go on and read do-nut.

3.08 Fluency

Jennifer: Fluency

Automaticity is really important because that leads to fluency which enable comprehension.

So if you are still reading really slowly, by the time you have gotten to the end of a paragraph, you have forgotten what was at the beginning.

Fluency allows you to not focus on trying to work out what the words are but to extract the meaning.

Anne: Fluency

We know that children with dyslexia, many of them, struggle to attain fluency, but as yet it is not quite clear how to promote that development of fluency. The best evidence we have so far is teaching children those basic foundations and then giving them lots and lots of practice. Children with dyslexia will need more practice than other children.

The more that we can have those children be excited about reading, want to read, be encouraged to read, that is where teachers have a lot of expertise. A lot more expertise than 'we' researchers into how to get children sparked into wanting to read for themselves.

It is through that repetition and practice that the fluency will emerge.

Jodi: Fluency

Ensuring that skills are mastered in isolation is a pre-requisite to getting results in accuracy and fluency of connected text.

You would have noticed with Teagan today, we work on those isolated skills but then what we like to do is get a real book in front of that child.

Not a reader, we want a real book.

We don't want pictures, we don't want contextual guessing.

We want an experience where the child is now showing us as their teacher that they are applying in real life the skills that we have taught them to go on and read that book.

At times, we will remind them that we really want to get those decoding skills to match the rate of speech that you speak. We believe that we are not going to give up until we get close to the reading fluency being at the same rate as what that child is able to achieve in their spoken speech.

Jodi: Fluency

We don't want to be laboured in our fluency to then impede our ability to make meaning. My role today was to make sure any word she didn't know, I gave her that word because the end result is to comprehend what we have read. I tap on any word that I am feeling she has missed.

I am there supporting her as much as possible until we have that accuracy and that fluency. Over time, I may be able to pull that scaffolding off. When I feel my student has been able to commit to her long term memory, what we hope for in all students, a direct route of reading.

3.09 Vocabulary

Suze: Oral language and vocabulary

You could be thinking about how you teach vocabulary.

When children learn words, they learn what words mean and the sound code associated with words.

A pre-learning activity may be where they brainstorm all the words the kids know and they may draw pictures.

While you are teaching those words, listen to the children. Make sure they are saying them correctly. Correct them and help them to say those words as accurately as they can.

What you are doing is strengthening the sound code that is linked to the word and associated to its meaning. This is all about building those foundations to make them ready for cracking the code for mapping across to sounds and letters.

Lorraine: Vocabulary

Some children start school with a rich vocabulary and others don't - it is all due to language experiences before formal schooling. We want to address that including the children that are most vulnerable.

The reason we need to do that is because we can get kids good at reading. The process of reading is not that difficult to teach.

Once children can decode words, then they won't necessarily understand the meaning of those words so comprehension is lost.

From the get go, we would be introducing words into children's vocabulary. That however is not going to be sufficient. We need to provide examples on a daily basis.

We need the children to repeat those words, use those words in context. Use them in their writing. Require them to do it well.

When children get older we introduce tier 2 words, sophisticated words that are not technical, such as 'aquarium' and 'serendipity'.

In order to explain a word that is difficult, we need to keep away from the dictionary, it will confound the process. They are books that have many, many words, not very many pages and everything is condensed.

For children, break it down into child friendly language and use synonyms.

Brooke: Vocabulary - development

In my classroom, I do a word a week.

One week we might look at 'mad'. I will teach them synonyms for mad. I will teach idioms for mad. And developing their vocabulary from that.

It is quite evident in the student's writing that they are really understanding the vocabulary and using it in context. When children write, I encourage the students to use synonyms and idioms instead of the word they want.

We use vocabulary throughout the day. 'girls and boys, say it in your livid voice, say it in your irate voice.'

They know those words because they have linked it to existing knowledge.

3.10 Comprehension

Suze: Language comprehension

Oral comprehension and reading comprehension are both fundamentally language comprehension but in a different medium. Listening comprehension relies on the hearing, the processing and the auditory memory. Reading comprehension relies on the actual decoding of the word but the act of comprehending the language is basically the same.

Mandy: Comprehension

It is actually about being able to understand the set of instructions in front of us - the historical description of something that took place a long time ago, the physics that is being described, to be mesmerized by an extraordinary story of courage. It is about understanding what we are reading, that is the point we want to get to with all students, with everybody.

We want students to be able to lie back, read effortlessly in their spare time and love it! So how do we get there?

We get there by taking students through that systematic teaching of learning about the necessary skills but alongside that we are always focusing on comprehension.

At an oral language level initially It is about understanding what is the story about? Talking about it, talking about some of the important messages. All of that fabulous oral language is about building those early comprehension skills.

Greg: Comprehension

But to teach kids to make meaning from text is the end game. It is not the act of reading itself. What we don't want is large number of kids who can read fluently but they are not making meaning from the text.

We focus very strongly on literal, inferential and evaluative comprehension, and that is difficult to teach.

We focus strongly on strategies that work to do that.

We do a lot of work on self talk with the kids so the teachers are modelling that to the students on how you talk your way through a text to make meaning from it.

Mandy: Reading comprehension is complicated.

It requires neurologically the capacity to use executive functioning because you are planning, you are predicting, you are reviewing all of the time.

Greg: Comprehension strategies

Using prior knowledge, their own knowledge

Looking for clues in the text

Doing comparisons

It would look like the teacher in front of the class walking through the text and reading a paragraph to the children and saying.

'I am looking for a word here that might give me a clue about what this character might be thinking.'

'I am using my past knowledge and I am looking at the look on his face and that is telling me he is not happy about this.'

So it is about getting the kids to delve deeper into the text, not just look at what does the text say.

Mandy: Comprehension and Syntax

Another component that is important for comprehension is syntax.

When we talk about grammar, we are talking about 2 components - syntax is the rules of sentence structure and morphology is the rules of words structure.

Students with good knowledge of syntax so they understand how we pack a sentence together. They understand the components of a sentence and what the rules are around forming sentences tend to have better comprehension.

Mandy: Comprehension and Morphology

Students that are morphologically aware know how words pack together, 70% of words from Grade 4 onwards are Latin and Greek. This means if you have an understanding of the structure of Latin words - prefix, base, suffix, then you start understanding the words you are coming up against in text. If you understand the words better, then you understand the passage better.

3.11 The Solutions

Jennifer: Teacher training and change in policy

In terms of teacher education and the faculties of education, they are a big heavy ship, it has to turn by degrees. It takes a long time and there are lots of people very invested in their own way of teaching reading. It is difficult to change their perceptions and their ways of doing things.

What has tended to happen is that policy has changed.

Greg: Expectations

We have to look at adapting our methods as teachers.

Not accept that kids can't learn.

Not accept that they are just behind.

An absolute belief that all children can learn.

All children can be good readers and good writers not matter what.

Jennifer: The solution

Being prepared to look outside the usual information channels, to be quite critical of the school practices and to be prepared to do things very differently from the way they have been done in the past.

Not to let offending the sensitivities of teachers and the way they do things stop change from occurring. In the end it should be the children's interests at the heart of what a school is doing.

Greg: Get the teaching practice right

If you haven't got the teaching practice right, it is like have a ship with too many holes in it. You are trying to plug all these holes.

Intervention won't work because you have too many kids that need intervention.

You can't have 30% of your kids at the end of grade 1 children failing on international standards - that is what is happening in this country.

What we need to do is to make sure at the end of grade 1, there are no kids failing.

Those kids that are behind, and it is only a couple of them, we can put those extra supports in place to help them.

Generally, if you get the teaching right with highly effective teaching strategies, then across the board, the kids can achieve.

Chris: Teacher knowledge

Teachers are the people that make a real difference despite home background, socio-economic status, prior experience with the child.

If they are in front of a teacher, a teacher who knows how the language system works, a teacher who knows how to teach systematically and explicitly, knows how to teach the Big 6 of reading then that child will experience success.

Greg: Message for Principals

We have other schools come to our school to visit us. When they see what we do, we have lots of questions on 'Our school wouldn't spend money on that.'

My response to that would be:

If you are not spending your money on improving your teaching,

If you are not spending your money on getting better results for your kids,

What are you spending it on?

It is about priorities.

When you have an absolute belief that you can do better for all kids, I am not saying we can work harder, I am just saying we can do it better, if you form that belief then that's where your finances have go into.

Lorraine: Teacher knowledge

So if you're a teacher and you are thinking, 'Gosh I don't know about positional frequency. I don't know about certain spelling rules.'

You can go on-line, you can pick up book. There are great resources that will support you in the teaching of phonological awareness, in the teaching of spelling and the teaching of writing.

The biggest step for a teacher is to admit 'If the kids aren't learning...it is actually my fault. I am the teacher. It's not their fault'

Unfortunately, a lot of kids take the blame for poor teaching...