

Florida Center for Reading Research

Reading: Language and Cognition

What is Reading: Language and Cognition?

Beacon Learning Center has developed a series of online professional development courses intended to meet the requirements of Florida's Reading Endorsement. The Beacon course entitled *Reading: Language and Cognition, Parts A and B* (30 hours each) was designed with the goal of satisfying competency one of the endorsement. Part A concentrates on fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary and is a prerequisite for Part B which is designed to develop an understanding of phonemic awareness, phonics and the interdependence of each of the five components of reading.

The findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) are embedded in the course including the importance of explicit, systematic instruction in the five components of reading. The course teaches that this type of instruction is beneficial for all students and especially for students who are learning English or who struggle to read well. For example, in Part A, explicit instruction is discussed in conjunction with fluency.

The course design is aligned with Florida's recommended order of assessing students as described on the Just Read, Florida! Website link for secondary educators. The course introduction provides a brief overview of the use of screening results to determine students' instructional needs in the area of reading. While assessment issues such as using fluency measures to diagnose reading problems are sprinkled throughout the course, the topic of assessment is covered more extensively in another course offered by Beacon. Instructional strategies backed by current reading research are presented throughout the sessions.

Reading: Language & Cognition, Part A is designed to develop an understanding of the reading components of fluency, comprehension and vocabulary and is composed of six sessions beginning with an introductory session that presents an overview of the findings from the National Reading Panel. Following the introduction, sessions two through four focus on reading comprehension in terms of the reading process, the importance of text purpose and variety, the role of cognition in comprehension and the influence of text structure on text meaning. Session five introduces fluency as an important component of the reading process by involving course participants in tasks such as conducting a fluency measure and practicing various strategies for improving students' fluency. Finally, session six on vocabulary focuses on topics such as word analysis, fostering vocabulary development, and instructional strategies for teaching vocabulary. Many sessions include additional information and strategies to help teachers address the needs of students who are new learners of English.



Reading Language and Cognition, Part B provides an introduction to the basics of reading including understanding the structure of language and the cognitive processes involved when children are learning to read. Session one includes an overview of the findings from the National Reading Panel along with assessment strategies for reading. Session two focuses on the reading and speaking processes and how they relate to each other. Session three introduces the concepts and differences of phonology, phonological awareness, and phonemic awareness. Participants learn to

identify activities and strategies to help develop each stage of phonological awareness including some age appropriate activities for secondary students. In session four, participants are introduced to the basic concepts of phonics, and they learn to identify and apply the structural patterns and analysis of words including age appropriate activities for secondary students. The difference between academic language and informal language along with the variations that occur in phonemic, semantic, and syntactic relationships in the English language as compared to other languages is explored in session five. The interdependence of the five components of reading and the influence of phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary on fluency and comprehension is the focus of session six. The final lessons in session six promote an understanding of the influence that dialect, writing, and print rich environments have on reading development.

What processes are in place in Reading: Language and Cognition?

The goals and objectives in the course are clearly defined. Each session begins by identifying the Florida Reading Competency Indicator addressed in the content followed by session objectives, topics, strategies and assessments or exercises. Then the course moves the participant through reading passages which are formatted with bold printed headings, bulleted lists, and some images and graphics. Special learning features such as links to online articles are offered to provide a "Closer Look" at the content. Several video links are provided to illustrate teaching strategies and concepts. Case Studies and visual representations of authentic student work are presented for participants to analyze. After the participant has completed the foundational portions of each session, he is required to complete application exercises designed to promote a more thorough understanding of the new content. Each session has from four to six objectives with an average of three exercises. Exercises require participants to complete tasks such as development and implementation of instructional materials and lesson plans, creation of graphic organizers, observation of video demonstration lessons, and completion of online assessments.

Session objectives are assessed through the exercises which are designed to reinforce and extend the content. Participants keep track of their exercises on the course log which keeps a printable and viewable record of each exercise. The items in the log are evaluated by a trained course facilitator to document successful completion of the course. Prior to beginning the course, participants complete a course pre-assessment; upon completion a post-test is required. Test results are used only to measure the program's effectiveness and are not used to evaluate participants' progress.

The course content is delivered entirely online; however, select exercises require applications of content and strategies with a case study student to promote the development of the skills taught in the course. An opportunity to collaborate and share information with other course participants is provided through an online discussion group. If participants have questions concerning course content or assignments, they can contact the course facilitator by accessing the Facilitator Contact link on the course's Navigation Bar.

Follow-up is addressed in several ways. Course exercises measure participants' understanding of the content addressed by the course objectives. Facilitators use quality criteria built on the reading endorsement indicators to evaluate each assignment submitted. If the assignment does not meet the quality criteria, the facilitator provides coaching to help the participant learn and demonstrate the required

skill/knowledge. The online content and required assignments provide a mechanism for participants to continue interacting with the new content over many weeks. As this occurs, the online discussion board provides an avenue for collaboration that encourages sharing of ideas and feedback on implementation. Even after course completion, participants continue to have access to the discussion group and can continue to post new questions and comments and get feedback from others.

Does Reading: Language and Cognition address the context in which it will be implemented?

Expectations regarding certain requirements necessary for successful course completion are included on Beacon's website. For example, technical requirements for successfully accessing and completing a course are provided in the course syllabus. Information on receiving inservice credit is also provided in the course syllabus. These requirements are accessible prior to registration through a "preview course" link that allows potential participants to view the course syllabus, table of contents, resources and a very helpful section entitled "Navigating Beacon's Online Courses". Because the course is designed to meet the requirements for Florida's Reading Endorsement competency 1, it could very possibly be taken simultaneously by many educators at a school site and across a school district. Though strategies, beyond the online discussion, are not suggested to promote collaboration among course participants reading coaches, and administrators; the course lends itself to face-to-face collaboration. Beacon recommends that districts offer at least an initial face-to-face meeting with participants to explain the program as a whole and to answer technical issues up front - as well as to begin building relationships among the participants. Beacon will provide guidelines for additional face-to-face meetings, if requested by the customer.

Currently, all facilitators for the course are reading coaches, mentors or resource teachers with the local school district, Bay District Schools. They were selected by Beacon based on their recognized expertise in reading and professional development. First-time facilitators complete an orientation course to ensure mastery of the course tools and to enhance the communication skills of the prospective facilitator. Beacon Learning Center offers an option for districts to provide their own local facilitator and recommends selection based on reading expertise. District selected facilitators must first successfully complete the online course they wish to facilitate and then they must complete Beacon's facilitator orientation course. All first time facilitators are mentored by a master facilitator who oversees their work and provides feedback and assistance as needed.

Materials for the online course may be printed for convenience. The online navigation within the course content is clear and well-defined; the text is well written and links are operational. The video clips, though brief, were well presented and provided quality models of concepts and strategies.

Research Support for Reading: Language and Cognition

As stated in the course introduction, the National Reading Panel findings provide the structure for the course. The content of the course is clearly intended to enable teachers to be successful in teaching reading through understanding the comprehension, fluency and vocabulary components of reading as identified by the National Reading Panel. This program design supports the link between student achievement and teacher use of research based teaching strategies in reading.

According to Beacon Learning Center, the developer and provider of the course, an external evaluation is in process in three Florida school districts using the course. This evaluation will analyze student achievement, teacher practices and knowledge of teachers who participate in the Beacon professional development course.

A matrix was provided by Beacon Learning Center that crosswalks Florida's Reading Competency 1 indicators and the course activities and assessments. A full matrix is being developed to crosswalk all six of the Florida Reading Competencies with Beacon's reading endorsement courses, some of which are under development at this time.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Reading: Language and Cognition*:

- The course objectives are well matched with Florida's Reading Competency 1 indicators.
- The design of the course's online delivery is efficient, flexible, and ensures fidelity of content.

Weaknesses of *Reading: Language and Cognition*:

- Guidelines for integrating face to face interactions may strengthen the program.

Which Florida districts have participated in Reading: Language and Cognition training?

Bay	850-872-7700
Gadsden	850-627-0401
Nassau	904-321-5881
Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Santa Rosa	850-983-5010
St. Johns	904-819-7502

For More Information

<http://www.beaconlearningcenter.com/>

References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.

Lead Reviewers: Jane Granger, M.S. & Georgia Jordan, M.S.
Date Posted: November, 2004

The content of this report is informational and factual. It is not to be construed as an advertisement, endorsement, or an officially "approved" product. Please view the Reader's Guide to FCRR Reports for an overview of the conditions under which these reports were prepared <http://www.fcrr.org/reports.htm>

Please send comments about this report to Marcia L. Grek, Ph.D.: reports@fcrr.org

©Florida Center for Reading Research
227 N. Bronough St., Suite 7250 • Tallahassee, FL 32301
<http://www.fcrr.org> • 850-644-9352