

Florida Center for Reading Research

Reading to Learn: Comprehension Instruction

What is Reading to Learn: Comprehension Instruction?

Reading to Learn: Comprehension Instruction (Reading to Learn) is an interactive Professional Development program developed by Performance Learning Systems (PLS). *Reading to Learn* combines CD-ROM material with facilitator led presentations and guided instruction, in a classroom format. The goal of *Reading to Learn* is to provide information to help teachers explicitly teach and monitor reading comprehension. The program introduces teachers to strategies for improving reading comprehension that have been developed from recent scientific research in reading. These strategies include: increasing vocabulary, text knowledge, and ongoing assessment and intervention. Teaching educators strategies for improving reading comprehension is the emphasis of this program.

Reading to Learn is a 40-hour course, with six seminars each ranging from four to eight hours in length. Additional hours are spent outside the class hours completing Action Research Assignments that are required for graduate level credit and future PLS instructors. It is the recommendation of PLS that all participants complete the Action Research Assignments, however the final decision lies with each district. The course begins with a self-assessment for participants to analyze their current reading comprehension teaching practices. At the end of the course they are asked to complete the same self-assessment and to complete an individual professional development plan for reading comprehension instruction. Content is delivered with a CD-ROM presentation followed by face-to-face facilitator presentations and guided instruction, related reflection journal questions, action research assignments, and research articles to be read by the participant. The purpose of the reflection journal is for participants to consider the content they are learning, analyze their current practices, and reflect upon possible instructional changes. The reflection journal and the research articles are found on both the CD-ROM and in the participant manual. The action research assignments are an essential component in helping to insure the depth of knowledge necessary for classroom implementation of the strategies taught in this course.

Participant materials include a course CD-ROM and a participant's manual.

Participants can refer to the CD-ROM for continuous updates. Facilitators are equipped with an Instructor Kit that includes the CD-ROM, an instructor's guide, a participant's manual and the materials necessary to guide a group of participants through the course. Technical support is provided with a troubleshooting guide and a tech support link on the CD-ROM. Although there is no scope and sequence, a course syllabus outlining each seminar's requirements and activities is included in the participant's manual. At this time *Reading to Learn* is still in the field test stage and will continue to have minor revisions, based on participant feedback, until 300 participants have completed the course. Although the materials are organized, the headings within each section are not clearly marked and typographical errors were found in the Facilitator's guide.



The course CD-ROM includes: multimedia seminars with mini lectures presented by national reading experts on reading instruction, teaching strategies and activities, links to a wide variety of web resources including state standards, research articles, and reflection journal questions.

There are several components considered integral to any successful professional development program: a coaching component to help ensure successful classroom implementation by providing follow-up feedback for participants; special content designed for school and district administrators, including classroom observation tools; evaluation and certification measures for determining participants' acquisition of the content in the professional development program. Although these components are not an integral part of *Reading to Learn*, they are offered by PLS in their Coaching course. PLS recommends that districts incorporate the Coaching course into their overall professional development plan. *Reading to Learn* is also available in a Train-the Trainer format that utilizes a train-the-trainer model with the *Reading to Learn* CD-ROM, Facilitator's Guide, and Kit.

How is *Reading to Learn* aligned with Reading First?

The focus of *Reading to Learn* is reading comprehension. While the program is not designed to teach the 5 components of reading, the Introductory Seminar does provide a review of the 5 components. Guided by findings from the National Reading Panel (2002) concerning comprehension instruction, *Reading to Learn* is organized in the following way: The Processes, Text Issues, Vocabulary, Practices, Engagement and Motivation, and Assessment and Intervention. Each of the topics is explicitly taught in a blended format, combining the CD-ROM presentation with face-to-face facilitator led discussions and activities. The workshop activities are designed to incorporate a combination of learning models that promote the development of the new skills and strategies that are emphasized in the program's content. Cooperative learning activities are used throughout the course and help build a learning community among the participants.

The Processes seminar is divided into four parts: The Introduction, The Learner, The Task, and The Text. The objectives of The Introductory section are to help support relationships among the participants through getting to know you activities, to examine the participants' current reading comprehension practices, to explore the *Reading to Learn* course content, to review the five components of effective beginning reading instruction, and to examine the strategies for improving reading comprehension. The focus of The Learner section is to help participants understand how providing students with background knowledge about a reading selection can positively impact reading comprehension. The objective of The Task is to explore how reading for different purposes (for pleasure, for information, or to solve problems) affects our reading approach. Participants are led through activities designed to enhance their understanding of the importance of providing instruction that will encourage students to recognize and consider the reading task, and then implement the reading strategy that will best increase their comprehension. In The Text section participants learn to recognize narrative and expository text. They are taught to identify the text structure, recognize the features, and understand the strategies for reading both types of text.

The next five seminars are all under the Instruction umbrella: Text Issues, Vocabulary, Practices, Engagement and Motivation, and Assessment and Intervention. The goal of the Text Issues seminar is to help participants differentiate between narrative and expository text and to explore research concerning the strategies and activities that have been shown to increase reader's understanding of the text presented. This seminar incorporates learning center activities in order to introduce teaching strategies that have proven to be successful for increasing reading comprehension for both narrative and expository text. The narrative strategies presented are: graphic organizers, question answering, comprehension monitoring, story structure, and summarizing. Participants are offered strategies for teaching six basic structures of expository text, which is the type of text most difficult for reading comprehension: cause and effect, compare and contrast, sequence, descriptive, problem/solution, and enumerative.

The importance of vocabulary instruction and its link to improving reading comprehension is the focus of the Vocabulary seminar. The seminar opens with clarification that the definition of vocabulary knowledge is the understanding of the meanings of words, not sight word knowledge. Both direct instruction and the conceptual approach to teaching vocabulary are presented along with the teacher's role in determining which words and concepts best fit the method of instruction. Direct instruction is the explicit and systematic teaching of vocabulary words that are pertinent to the student's understanding of new reading material. A CD-ROM presentation explains Steven Stahl's (1999) conceptual approach for teaching vocabulary using the following strategies: Semantic Mapping, Semantic Feature Analysis, Possible Sentences, Concept-of Definition Map, and Compare and Contrast. A workshop activity and an action research assignment related to Isabel Beck's "Taking Delight in Words: Using Oral Language to Build Young Children's Vocabulary" article (2002) provides ideas and activities for teaching words to young children.

The Practices seminar focuses on explicit teaching techniques for comprehension instruction with a variety of teaching strategies: direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, feedback, and application. Learning how formative assessment is used to guide instruction, the impact of fluency on reading comprehension, learning to identify the three reading levels (independent instructional, frustration), and learning strategies to implement before reading, during reading, and after reading provide the framework for guiding instruction to maximize student's comprehension.

The Motivation and Engagement seminar informs participants of the latest research based methods for inspiring readers to become engaged readers, ones who read actively for enjoyment and to learn. Guidelines for enhancing motivation in the classroom, providing immediate remediation for struggling readers, and motivating the remedial reader at the secondary level are explored in this seminar.

The Instruction and Assessment seminar provides an introduction of how to assess student's reading levels, identify specific reading problems, and provide intervention strategies to increase reading levels. Participants are informed that assessment serves two main purposes: to guide instruction, and to monitor students' progress toward learning goals. Formal and informal assessments including explanations and examples of each are presented. PLS recommends that participants attend further training in the areas of assessment and intervention.

The Intervention seminar allows participants the opportunity to assimilate all of the information learned into classroom application. The seminar begins with a review of the meaning and importance of explicit, systematic and supportive instruction in a beginning reading program. It follows with the emphasis that explicit, systematic, and supportive instruction must be even more intense for an intervention reading program.

Although a crosswalk between *Reading to Learn* and Florida's Reading Endorsement Competencies is not included in the program materials, PLS did provide a general outline linking Florida's Reading Endorsement Competencies with five PLS courses, including *Reading to Learn*.

Research Support for Reading to Learn



Reading to Learn is a new program that has been developed within the past two years. *Reading to Learn* has been conducting field tests this year and is making revisions based upon the participant's feedback. Although the program is too new to have empirical research to support its use, the content of the program is solidly based on scientific, empirical research on reading.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Reading to Learn*:

- The CD-ROM seminars, facilitator led activities, homework assignments, and action research assignments are all conceptually linked allowing optimum understanding for follow-up classroom implementation.

Weaknesses of *Reading to Learn*:

- Follow up support, content knowledge assessment and administrator support components are found in the PLS Coaching course and are not integral parts of *Reading to Learn*.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Reading to Learn?

Bay	850-872-7700
Desoto	863-494-4222
Jefferson	850-342-0100
Lake	352-253-6510
Leon	850-487-7147
Madison	850-973-5022
Marion	352-671-7702
Orange	407-317-3202
Taylor	850-838-2500

For More Information

http://plsweb.com/sec07_advantage/reading/training.html

References

Beck, I., Kucan, L., & McKeown, M. (2002). Taking Delight in Words Using Oral Language to Build Young Children's Vocabularies. In Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction. New York: Guilford Press.

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.



Stahl, S. (1999). *Vocabulary Development*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

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