Florida’s Reading First Academies: a First Step Toward Teaching Excellence

Dr. Joseph K. Torgesen
Florida State University and
The Florida Center for Reading Research

Training of Trainers for Reading First Academies
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Beginning with the end in mind:

The Reading First Academies are the first step toward helping all teachers acquire the teaching skills, knowledge, and motivation required to teach every child to read proficiently.
They directly support two of the **Three Big Ideas** of Florida’s Reading First Plan for leaving no child behind in reading

1. Increase the quality and consistency of instruction in every K-3 classroom. Provide initial instruction that is appropriate to the needs of the **majority** of students in the class

2. Conduct timely and valid assessments of reading growth to identify struggling readers

3. Provide high quality, intensive interventions to help struggling readers catch up with their peers
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3. Provide high quality, intensive interventions to help struggling readers catch up with their peers.
What do we want our classroom teachers to know how to do?

We want them to know how to teach even difficult children all the skills and knowledge required to read words in text accurately and fluently.

We want them to know how to teach vocabulary so that children can fluently identify the meaning of words in multiple contexts.

We want them to know how to teach children to think actively while they read in order to construct meaning.

We want them to know how to help children acquire a love of reading and a sense of how reading can help them in their lives.
Research indicates that students need to acquire skills and knowledge in at least five main areas in order to become proficient readers.

**Five critical components:**

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension strategies

Identifying words accurately and fluently

Constructing meaning once words are identified
What else do we want our teachers to know how to do

We want them to know how to organize their classrooms so that they have time for differentiated, small group instruction as part of every 90 minute reading block.

We want them to know how to use assessment data to identify children in need of immediate, intensive interventions and to help identify their instructional needs.

We want them to know how to create a classroom atmosphere and manage student behavior so that learning opportunities are maximized throughout the day.

We want them to know how to help children select reading material that will be enjoyable as well as stimulating for continued growth in reading ability.
The very best teachers of children who have difficulties learning to read are Relentless in their pursuit of every child.
“…. Although some children will learn to read in spite of incidental teaching, others **never** learn unless they are taught in an organized, systematic, efficient way by a **knowledgeable teacher** using a **well-designed instructional approach.**” (Moats, 1999)
In Florida, the most public measure of our success in teaching all children is performance on the reading portion of the FCAT.

Performance on the FCAT assesses the degree to which students have met the state standards in reading, which are focused on how well the student can understand and think about the content and ideas in text.

The FCAT is generally considered to be an excellent, demanding test of reading comprehension.
The FCAT has some important characteristics

It was specifically created to place high demands on vocabulary and reasoning/inferential skills

“FCAT demands an in-depth understanding and application of information that is not typical of most standardized tests.” (Lessons Learned, 2002)

Design specifications call for “application of skills in cognitively challenging situations.”

Proportion of questions requiring “higher order” thinking skills increases from 30% in grade three to 70% in grade 10
The FCAT has some important characteristics.

The FCAT may also place special demands on reading fluency, as opposed to “labored accuracy.”

Passage length at different levels:
- 3rd grade – 325 words
- 7th grade – 816 words
- 10th grade – 1008 words
We recently completed a study to understand what factors were most important in explaining individual differences in performance on the FCAT in 3rd, 7th, and 10th Grade.

Gave 2 hour battery of language, reading, nonverbal reasoning, and memory tests to approximately 200 children in each grade at 3 locations in the state.

**Language** – Wisc Vocab and Similarities
- Listening comprehension with FCAT passage

**Reading** – Oral reading fluency, TOWRE, Gray Oral Reading Test

**NV Reasoning** – Wisc Matrix Reasoning, Block Design

**Working Memory** – Listening span, Reading Span
Dominance Results

Fluency completely dominated Language, Nonverbal Reasoning, and Memory.

Language completely dominated Nonverbal Reasoning and Memory.

Nonverbal Reasoning and Memory were equally (un)dominate.
The graph shows the percent of variance accounted for in various domains for 7th grade students. The domains include Fluency, Verbal, Non Verbal, and Memory. The values for each domain are as follows:

- Fluency: 43%
- Verbal: 51%
- Non Verbal: 22%
- Memory: 5%

The graph highlights the significant contribution of Verbal skills compared to other domains.
Dominance Results

- Dominance was not established between fluency and verbal knowledge/reasoning, but both completely dominated nonverbal reasoning and memory.
Fluency

Verbal

Non Verbal

Memory

10th Grade

Percent of variance accounted for

32
52
28
5
Dominance Results

- Verbal knowledge and reasoning completely dominated fluency and memory. Fluency completely dominated memory.
What skills are particularly deficient in level 1 and level 2 readers in 3rd grade?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/ability</th>
<th>FCAT Performance Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPM on FCAT</td>
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<td>WPM on DIBELS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluency percentile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phonemic decoding</td>
<td>25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal knowledge/ reasoning</td>
<td>42nd</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The very best teachers of children who have difficulties learning to read are relentless.

Let no child “escape” from first grade without being proficient in phonemic decoding skills.
Why is it important for children to acquire good phonemic decoding skills (phonics) early in reading development?

Because learning to read involves everyday encounters with words the child has never before seen in print.

Phonemic analysis provides the most important single clue to the identity of unknown words in print.
Facts about reading from scientific research:

To be a fluent reader, a child must be able to recognize most of the words in a passage “by sight”

Children must correctly identify words 3-8 times before they become “sight words”

Children must make accurate first guesses when they encounter new words, or the growth of their “sight word vocabulary” will be delayed—they will not become fluent readers
Facts about reading from scientific research:

The most efficient way to make an “accurate first guess” of the identity of a new word is:

First, do phonemic analysis and try an approximate pronunciation

Then, close in on the exact right word by selecting a word with the right sounds in it, that also makes sense in the passage

(chapter 10, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (2000)
Words likely to be encountered for the first time in first grade:

- animal
- faster
- happy
- never
- time
- sleep
- rabbit
**Words likely to be encountered for the first time in second grade**

- amaze
- beach
- comfortable
- example
- interesting
- grease
- stiff
- sweep
In the middle, it was the time for a person to wear his full set of armor whenever he was in battle - even in times of war! When a person believed he was friends, he would give up his armor. This act showed that the person felt safe.
During the middle ages, it was the custom for a knight to wear his full set of armor whenever he appeared in public - even in times of peace! When a knight believed he was among friends, he would remove his helmet. This symbol of friendship showed that the knight felt welcome and safe.
After reviewing recent educational, psychological, linguistic, and neurobiological research on reading, 5 eminent scientists recently concluded:

“From all these different perspectives, two inescapable conclusions emerge. The first is that mastering the alphabetic principle is essential to becoming proficient in the skill of reading. . . . . . “ and the second is that instructional techniques (namely phonics) that teach this principle directly are more effective than those that do not.” (Rayner, et al., 2001)

Because of the findings from scientifically based research in reading, we are asking teachers to change the way many have been teaching reading in their classrooms.

The most significant change will be toward instruction that teaches each of the major components in a more systematic and explicit way.
What do we mean by systematic and explicit?

**Systematic**

Guided by a scope and sequence that is comprehensive, that teaches all the appropriate knowledge and skills in a “programmatically scaffolded” manner
Programmatic Scaffolding

The program of instruction is carefully sequenced so that students are explicitly taught the skills and knowledge they need for each new task they are asked to perform

- Oral blending skills before blending printed words
- Awareness of phonemes before learning how they are represented in print
- Grapheme-phoneme knowledge before decoding
- Vocabulary instruction before reading for meaning
- Strategies for oral language comprehension that support reading comprehension
What do we mean by systematic and explicit?

**Systematic**

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**Explicit**

“First graders who are at risk for failure in learning to read do not discover what teachers leave unsaid about the complexities of word learning. As a result, it is important to directly teach them procedures for learning words” (Gaskins, et al., 1997)
Short a as in man, hand, and pat
The short /a/ sound, as in *sat*, *fat*, and *cat*
The very best teachers of children who have difficulties learning to read are

Relentless

Beginning in Kindergarten, teach vocabulary and thinking skills as intensely, and robustly as possible
Big ideas from “Bringing Words to Life”

First-grade children from higher SES groups know about twice as many words as lower SES children.

High school seniors near the top of their class knew about four times as many words as their lower performing classmates.

High-knowledge third graders have vocabularies about equal to lowest-performing 12th graders.

Individual differences in vocabulary have a powerful impact on reading comprehension beginning about third grade.
Big ideas from “Bringing Words to Life”

Poor children, who enter school with vocabulary deficiencies have a particularly difficult time learning words from “context”

Research has discovered much more powerful ways of teaching vocabulary than are typically used in classrooms

A “robust” approach to vocabulary instruction involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, interactive follow-up.
The Academies are an important first step...but they will not be sufficient

Professional development for teachers

Reading First Academies — four days

Ongoing leadership structure for professional development — Director of Professional Development, Regional Professional Development Coordinators

Job-embedded professional development in the classrooms through expert coaches — leading to broad and deep learning and behavior change

Professional development through providers at the District level — offered on an ongoing basis across six years
Each Reading First School is required to implement a core reading curriculum at each grade level that follows instructional principles and focuses on content consistent with findings from recent research on reading.

“A well developed curriculum that blends explicit instructional strategies within a coherent instructional design acts as an important scaffold to guide teacher behaviors so they will be more consistent with the principles of effective instruction.”
“In general, it appears that the clarity and organization of research-based components in the curriculum make a difference to reading outcomes. However, out-of-the-box implementations of basal reading programs are not likely to be effective. Again, ongoing professional development that provides the rationale for each component of reading (and spelling) instruction and provides classroom coaching to deal with the pacing of instruction, classroom management, and grouping of students is what helps teachers develop successful readers. Expecting teachers to put aside their basal readers and create their own research-based curricula is not realistic given the lack of resources and of the knowledge base to do so.” (Rayner, et al., 2001)
“There are many programs that, if properly implemented, could help a school move in the right direction, but nothing could ever take the place of a knowledgeable and talented teacher” (Wren, 2002)

“Research has repeatedly indicated that the single most important variable in any reading program is the knowledge and skill of the teacher implementing the program…”

“The right answer is the hard answer – The solution for helping struggling readers succeed is to cultivate a population of teachers who are very knowledgeable about how children learn to read and who are adept at applying their understanding of reading acquisition to the assessment and instruction of individual children.”
Reading First is the most difficult educational challenge any of us have ever faced.

It will require **relentless** pursuit of the goal of teaching all children what they need to know to be good readers....
Thank You
References Used:


