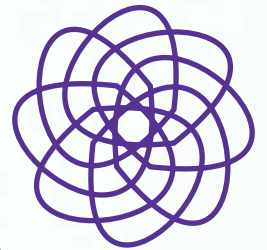




10 Reasons Why Teaching Literacy Is Like Learning to Ride a Bike

Find Out How LETRS Professional Learning Can Help



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Teaching students to read should be easy, right?

Once you know how to read, it feels so natural that it is easy to take for granted as an innate skill we all possess—kind of like riding a bicycle and forgetting you had to learn how. Yet, we continue to see a growing crisis of illiteracy across our education system, with students at every grade level falling behind in reading test scores.

Just as there are many skills needed to ride a bicycle, there are a number of essential skills involved in reading.

Like knowing how to ride a bicycle before you can teach another, effective teachers of reading should know and understand HOW students learn to read and write, recognize the reasons WHY some students struggle, and be able to determine WHAT to teach to increase student success.

10 Here are 10 reasons why teaching literacy is like learning to ride a bicycle and how LETRS professional learning can help raise reading achievement.

1. Balance, balance, balance.
2. A bicycle isn't going to ride itself.
3. It helps to have someone cheering for you.
4. Roadblocks can be overcome.
5. You need a solid foundation beneath your wheels.
6. If you fall off, get back on.
7. Sometimes, you cannot clearly see the road.
8. Bicycling builds muscles, but it takes patience and practice.
9. With the necessary skills, you can ride fast and do wheelies.
10. Mastery helps you enjoy the ride.

1. Balance, balance, balance.

Without training on the essential components of reading, educators are unable to effectively teach literacy. Many higher education teacher preparation courses teach only some of the components recommended by major consensus reports like the National Reading Panel (National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The majority of teacher preparation programs do not offer courses that thoroughly prepare teachers to build all of the essential skills involved in reading (Brady et al., 2009; Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013; Joshi, Binks, Hougren, Dahlgren, Dean, & Smith, 2009; Joshi, Binks, Graham, Dean, Smith, & Boulware-Gooden, 2009; Walsh, Glaser, & Dunne-Wilcox, 2006).

Developed by Dr. Louisa Moats and leaders in the field of literacy, LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) professional learning helps educators teach the skills needed to master the foundational and fundamentals of reading and writing instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.

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LETRS is a well-developed, step-by-step program that takes teachers through knowledge of reading, scope, and sequence with the best strategies and the best research to support it. ... LETRS has empowered our teachers to do their best for kids.

— Linda Flint, Reading Coordinator, Kansas

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2. A bicycle isn't going to ride itself.

Even with the best curriculum available, if teachers are unsure of what to do with it, it will sit unused on the shelf. Successful use of a program depends on how well a teacher understands the content and purpose of its various components and instructional routines. Mandating use of a good curriculum does not guarantee a strong implementation (Haager, Heimichner, Dhar, Mouton, & McMillan, 2008; Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). General and special education teachers will be more inclined to teach foundational reading and writing skills, along with comprehension, if they are well prepared in the content and methodology of code-based, explicit instruction (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004).

Educators matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling. However, many educators are not well prepared to teach all students to read, including those who struggle. LETRS provides a professional learning course of study based in the science of reading for elementary educators that teaches the how, what, and why of literacy acquisition to improve instructional practice and impact long-term systemic change in literacy instruction.

3. It helps to have someone cheering for you.

Teachers need compatible coaching and peer support. Even if they understand and want to apply the type of instruction supported by scientific research, they are more likely to do so if they work in a supportive, collaborative environment. Grade-level teammates, coaches, mentors, and school administrators must share goals and create a mutually supportive environment for powerful, informed instruction to be the norm in a school. Compatible coaching, in which the coach and teacher share the same goals and the same knowledge base, makes a significant difference in teacher success with students (Carlisle, & Berebitsky, 2011).

With LETRS, teachers and administrators receive the structure and support for educators of all experience levels. Shared learning opportunities provide a venue for authentic collaboration, build camaraderie, and create a collective sense of purpose in achieving success with a district's literacy initiative.

4. Roadblocks can be overcome.

Learning to read is neither easy nor natural for the majority of students—they do not just pick it up through exposure to good books (Adlof & Perfetti, 2014; Olson, Keenan, Byrne, & Samuelsson, 2014; Seidenberg, 2013, 2017). Teaching reading to a student who does not learn easily or naturally is a complex and challenging professional enterprise that requires deep knowledge of content, of the cognitive and language factors that shape student learning, and of pedagogical detail (Brady, 2011; Moats, 1999).

LETRS addresses the structures of English, the cognitive processes of learning to read, and the teaching practices proven to be effective in preventing and remediating reading difficulties, including dyslexia. When educators learn and apply the research contained in LETRS in the classroom, their substantive professional learning will have powerful positive effects on student learning, including an increase in overall achievement levels and fewer students experiencing reading difficulties.



“The LETRS training effectively connected current research to explicit instruction and gave all participants meaningful content and strategies to implement in classrooms immediately.”

—Pamela Herrera, Supervisor of Title I, Delaware

5. You need a solid foundation beneath your wheels.

Most teachers have not had courses in language structure or language development even though learning to read and write entirely depend on, and are intertwined with, language competence at many levels. Teachers of reading must be teachers of language. For example, there are many factual details that explain how English spelling represents sounds, syllables, and meaning that teachers must know to help students remember words (Moats, 1995, 2010; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011). These details include similarities and contrasts among the speech sounds, and how letters and their combinations are used to represent sounds, syllables, and meaningful parts of words. Likewise, there are many aspects of academic language in text that teachers should be teaching explicitly, such as how syntax and meaning are related and how text is organized (Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro, 2015).

LETRS fills these gaps and enhances teachers' understanding of the complexities of language, setting the groundwork for effective reading instruction. The most fundamental responsibility of schools is teaching students to read and write. The future success of all students hinges upon their ability to become proficient readers. Districts need literacy instruction that equips their educators with effective tools, strategies, and professional knowledge to teach their students to read and write at high levels.

6. If you fall off, get back on.

Concepts about language are elusive and challenging for many adults, even if we assume them to be simple on the surface because we expect young children to master them. In fact, many adults who become teachers of reading do not have fully developed phoneme awareness or an understanding of why words are spelled the way they are (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, & Chard, 2001; Moats, 1995; Fielding-Barnsley, 2010; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, & Lee, 2008). For example, in a recent study by Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, and Lee (2008), the authors found that "the phonemic skill level of the reading and special education teachers was not sufficient to provide accurate phonemic awareness intervention. ...Many teachers had specific misconceptions about speech and print (p. 517)."

LETRS treats phoneme awareness and phonics (two areas where most teachers need more training) with clarity, depth, and practical guidance, helping teachers value and understand the impact of these basic foundational skills as a bridge to more complex literacy skills.

“ Thank you for providing the most valuable training I’ve received in my entire educational career. I now have the knowledge, backed by research, to support my teachers as they create reading success for all students.

— Gary Robinson, Principal, Indiana ”



7. Sometimes, you cannot clearly see the road.

Before substantive professional training occurs, teachers typically have misconceptions about their own knowledge base for teaching reading. Those who know more about reading tend to underestimate their knowledge and those who know less tend to overestimate their knowledge. Therefore, teachers may not be the best judges of what they need to learn (Brady et al., 2009; Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004).

LETRS provides teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and the means for measuring their own knowledge gain, helping them recognize their gaps in knowledge and increasing personal accountability for their district's reading program success.

8. Bicycling builds muscles, but it takes patience and practice.

To learn about the essential components of reading instruction and how to implement them, several years may be required (Moats & Foorman, 2003, 2008; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Extended time is necessary for working teachers who must adjust and change existing practices while striving to absorb new information about an area for which they may have limited disciplinary knowledge. More practice is necessary for teachers to learn concepts than is typically provided in short-term courses or workshops (Spear-Swerling, 2009; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2003, 2004). As Cunningham et al. (2009) argue, teachers learn at different rates and often begin their coursework or professional development with inaccurate ideas about how much, and what, they should learn to be effective in the classroom. Many teachers need direct feedback about the differences between their actual knowledge and what they believe they know.

LETRS is designed to take about two years, but its high degree of flexibility in implementation models allows for targeted learning around specific topics. Self-paced, online coursework provides anytime access to high-quality learning experiences, which is delivered in intuitive, digestible chunks, making it ideal for professional learning community settings.

9. With the necessary skills, you can ride fast and do wheelies.

We know that substantive professional training has been shown to have powerful beneficial effects on student learning.

When early childhood, general education, administrators, and intervention teachers learn and apply the information contained in LETRS with a supportive context in place, overall achievement levels increase and fewer children experience reading difficulties (Carlisle, Correnti, Phelps, & Zeng, 2009; Foorman, Schatschneider, Eakin, Fletcher, Moats, & Francis, 2006; McCutchen et al., 2002; McCutchen, Green, Abbott, & Sanders, 2009; Moats & Foorman, 2008).

10. Mastery helps you enjoy the ride.

Effective teachers are more content and enjoy their jobs. This factor is less often measured and documented, but in a four-year project with low-performing, high-poverty schools in Washington, D.C., and Houston, Texas, teachers who learned how to teach effectively brought their students from below basic up to the national average in reading (Moats & Foorman, 2008).

Along with these improvements came consistently enthusiastic feedback from teachers who participated in courses like LETRS during the four years. Teacher absenteeism diminished; interest in professional learning accelerated; pride and empowerment replaced burnout and low expectations. These outcomes and goals have been achieved in many settings across the country. Providing professional learning that is ongoing, is job-embedded, and closes the gap between knowledge and practice can help retain educators. Having a clear vision, actionable steps, and the support of experts can lead to teacher retention and lower turnover.



LETRS literacy professional learning for early childhood and elementary educators and administrators is an investment in educator literacy knowledge and professional practice. Teachers gain essential knowledge to master the fundamentals of literacy instruction required to transform student learning.



Teachers matter more to student achievement than any other factor. A skilled instructor can change the lives of students.

LETRS literacy professional learning is the first step toward a critical change in practice that can alter the course of students' futures. It is a change in the way teachers teach reading, a change in the effectiveness of instruction, and a change to the trajectory of literacy for all. If you have educators who missed the training wheels stage of literacy instruction and are wobbling through reading programs, LETRS will give them the necessary tools to confidently propel themselves and their students along the literacy journey.



Learn the What, Why, and How of LETRS:
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v6 12.08.2021