

Florida Center for Reading Research

Project Read

What is Project Read?

Project Read is a comprehensive language arts program designed to provide explicit instruction in a structured reading curriculum. The goal of the program is to help all students become thoughtful, purposeful, and independent readers. *Project Read* Curriculum may be implemented in the regular classroom, special education classes, and Title I classes. It may also be used as an intervention reading program for first through sixth graders or with adolescents and adults who struggle with reading or language learning. Whole or small group instruction is delivered by a classroom teacher, a special education teacher, or a reading teacher. Lessons are intended to occur daily within an extended block of time devoted to reading instruction. Emphasis is placed on systematic, direct instruction of concepts and skills supported and enhanced by a teaching approach that includes visual, kinesthetic, auditory and tactile strategies (VAKT), and the use of body language.

Project Read offers language arts instruction in three curricular strands: Encoding/Decoding, Reading Comprehension, and Written Expression. The Encoding and Decoding strand includes phonics instruction targeted for students at different age levels: Early Education for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students, Primary Phonics for 1st-3rd grade students, and Linguistics, a decoding and encoding program for older students (4th-12th grade) who are struggling readers. The Reading Comprehension strand provides instruction in three different forms: Story Form Literature Connection-focused on narrative text for grades 1-5, Report Form-with emphasis on expository text for students in grades 3-12, and Story Form- focused on narrative text for grades 6-12. The Written Expression strand, Framing Your Thoughts, provides systematic and sequential instruction for written expression.

The scope and sequence of *Project Read* is explicitly outlined at the beginning of each teacher's guide and includes instructional pacing, skill and concept introduction, and spelling generalizations and patterns. An additional curriculum integration chart offers projected learner outcomes as it weaves decoding instruction with comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency practice, and written expression instruction. The sequence of skills within phonics lessons is arranged from the simplest unit of sound to more complex, from highest frequency of use to lowest, and at times delays the introduction of some skills because their function is dependent on the development of other concepts.

Each lesson's format is provided within a consistent framework that includes the named skill, the concept and teaching objective, and the 'anticipatory set' (detailed teacher directives that include teacher modeling, guided practice with feedback, VAKT and body language routines that extend and support instruction and student practice), independent student practice and application, and cumulative review.

Unique to *Project Read* are the VAKT and body language supports used to guide students through each lesson. For example, within the routine for the introduction of the short vowel, [i], the teacher says, "The short vowel [i] captures the sound /i/"; then she demonstrates the hand signal for short [i]. Next, the teacher models finger blending of



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sounds, saying /i/ and /t/ (t was previously introduced) as she uses her fingers to indicate /i/ and /t/, then sweeping her fingers together as she says the word *it*, and finally elaborating on the word's meaning and using it in a sentence. Then students make the hand signals and say the sounds (Do and Say). Next, students practice saying the sound aloud while they perform a sequence of VAKT techniques including tracing over the [i] symbol that is outlined with glue, tracing an imaginary [i] symbol on lined felt, skywriting (writing the symbol in the air) the letter three times, and writing the symbol [i] in a memory box (tray of sand). Teacher directed learning continues with word building as the teacher places letter cards in a pocket chart or on the board and leads the students through tapping out the sounds and sweeping them together to make a word. Students blend the sounds together to unlock the word, read the word with the teacher, and use the word orally in a sentence. Extended practice activities include students filling in the missing vowel, teacher modeling using words in a sentence, and oral reading of decodable text with teacher support. Each student decorates a Jewel Box to store 'precious gems' (vocabulary words selected for 80% mastery in reading and spelling) which are later used to build sentences.

Checks for understanding occur throughout each lesson as students read words containing the targeted skill; when a word is not automatically decoded, the student taps out the sounds s/he hears in the word and then blends the sounds to read the word. Next, students finger spell short [i] words or build them using Spell Tabs. Within the Finger Spelling routine the teacher says a word, the student repeats the word, the teacher puts the word in a sentence, the teacher throws the word out to the students, the students catch the word and finger spell it one sound at a time. Finally, the teacher dictates a sentence for student writing.

Teacher and student materials are numerous, though well organized within each instructional strand and easy to use. Each instructional strand includes teacher guides, lesson plans, independent practice materials for students, wall charts, manipulatives, assorted cards for automaticity practice, and instructional DVD's to help ensure fidelity.

The program provides comprehensive student assessments, keys for the teacher and grading charts that are aligned with each of the instructional strands. Primary Phonics includes mastery tests to be administered at the end of each of 43 units and end of the year assessment tests for Phonics levels 1, 2, and 3. Linguistics assessments include assessments for units 1-27 as well as a phonemic awareness screener, decoding assessment, encoding test, dictation test, fluency assessment, and teacher keys and grading charts. Unit mastery tests for grades K-12 are available for the written expression strand.

How is Project Read aligned with current reading research?

Project Read integrates the five critical components of reading instruction-phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension-along with the dimensions of spelling, writing, oral language, and listening comprehension within each lesson. An important component of instruction that is beneficial is the cumulative nature of the scaffolded practice embedded in the program. Each instructional routine consistently begins with a review of previously taught skills, and continues with teacher modeling of a new skill or strategy, guided practice and student practice, and includes frequent progress monitoring checks to affirm mastery.

Each lesson within the Primary Phonics Strand begins with phonological/phonemic awareness instruction; it is explicit, systematic, and follows the continuum of word types from simplest to most complex. Features of sound production are explicitly addressed in instructional DVDs and in the teacher directives. Initial instruction in the introduction of

each new phoneme stresses the production of the sounds and provides cues for oral-motor production, i.e., 'where do my lips, tongue, or teeth go in making the sound?' The use of hand signals, finger blending, word tapping, syllable counting, and oral sentence dictation are incorporated throughout each lesson and oral activities include sound blending, segmentation, deletion, substitution, and addition. However, this instruction is not separate from phonics instruction; once students demonstrate understanding of sounds within a lesson, this knowledge is immediately linked to phonics (sound/symbol correspondence) instruction.

A sound-symbol organization chart classifies sounds into six categories: consonants, digraphs, short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs, and r controlled. Within each category, sounds are presented from most frequently used to least frequently used. This chart is available for display as a wall chart, and students are given a blank copy to fill in as each sound is learned. A second sound-symbol organizational chart for spelling generalizations provides an overview for the phonemes/graphemes of our language. Explicit instruction in the use of syllable types is provided within a graphic of the number seven, where closed, open, -cle, r control, final magic e, vowel team, and diphthong syllable types are displayed. Phonics instruction continues systematically with multiple practice opportunities in reading word lists, sentences, and decodable texts (the Bonnie Kline Selected Stories) and follows the continuum of word types beginning with VC and CVC. Phonetically irregular words, called Red Words (depicted in red ink on word cards), are introduced systematically prior to their exposure in connected text.

Cutting patterns for syllabication are taught and illustrated with the number five, which displays a mnemonic for dividing words into syllables.



Spelling lessons are presented in booklets designed for individual student use to support and extend instruction that was presented in the Phonics Guide and Lesson Plans Volumes 1, 2, and 3. Each lesson includes a spelling list and sentences for reading and spelling mastery. Aligned strategies and activities include work with word meanings, building, searches, scrambles, alphabetizing, sentence dictation, finger spelling, spelling generalizations, crossword puzzles, synonyms, antonyms, and filling in vocabulary for sentence and story completion. An Affix Guide, presents high level word attack skills in 20 teaching units that present affixes and roots along with scaffolded practice.

Linguistics, the decoding/encoding program for older struggling students, systematically presents the concepts and skills of phonics instruction within 27 units. Instruction begins with an introduction to the sound-symbol relationship of the English language as students are presented with a phoneme-grapheme organizational chart and shown how the 44 speech sounds in our language can be categorized into six compartments. A second chart, the Linguistics Guide Spelling Calculator, provides a graphic of sound-symbol organization for spelling generalizations. Phonics instruction then proceeds rapidly from simple skills to complex and from lowest frequency of use to highest, supported throughout with extended practice in reading and spelling connected words, sentences, and text. An additional Linguistic Spelling Guide supplements reading instruction with a reading and spelling list for each grapheme, including vocabulary selection based on frequency of use.

Vocabulary development is supported throughout all *Project Read* instruction; word meanings are taught along with sounds and used in context in sentences and text. An instructional routine includes introducing the word, providing the word's definition and examples, and checking for student understanding. Prefixes and suffixes are taught to support understanding of word meaning and spelling. Vocabulary is also enhanced in

the comprehension strand with instruction in dialogue, story genre, puns, multiple meanings, similes, and figurative language. The accompanying writing program, Framing Your Thoughts, teaches word use in sentence design and uses symbols to represent the function of words in a sentence.

Fluency practice is provided through solo and choral reading of words, sentences, and text, sentence dictation with repetition, and oral practice with controlled readers; and teaching of syllabication to improve fluent reading of multisyllabic words, sentence diagramming for understanding phrasing, and voice marks for inflection and expression.

Comprehension instruction is systematically and explicitly addressed in *Project Read's* Story and Report Form. Unique story puzzles, story charts, and graphic organizers provide tools to help students focus on text structure and the elements of narrative literature including setting, plot, characters, problem/conflict, rising action, climax, and falling action. Post-it tabs imprinted with symbols representing each element assist students in labeling the parts of a story. Instruction guiding students to develop an understanding of beginning, middle, and end is provided and story types such as fantasy, human interest, and realistic animal are explicitly introduced with examples provided for reading practice. Focusing questions for each story are created using Bloom's Taxonomy. The scope and sequence for the Report Form outlines explicit instruction for teaching students a process to collect, organize, and synthesize information when reading expository text. Included in this process are pulling out the subject, unlocking key facts, selecting supporting details, identifying sub details, sorting categories, making inferences. Every lesson includes guided practice and frequent checks for understanding.

Project Read has three staff development models available for individuals or districts at an additional cost: Models A, B, and C. Model A (off campus) provides inservice in a workshop format. *Project Read* consultants present the methodology, curriculum, and teaching strategies of one of the three strands-Decoding/Encoding, Reading Comprehension, or Written Expression. A teaching demonstration may be included if students can be brought to the inservice site. Model B consists of on-campus inservice during regular school hours. Three 40-minute demonstration teaching lessons are modeled in classrooms by a *Project Read* consultant during school hours. These lessons may be observed by several grade area teachers. At the end of the day, teachers attend a three hour inservice which encompasses the curriculum and program methodology. Typical time for this professional development varies by curriculum strand: Phonics (kindergarten)-1 day, Phonics (grades 1-3)-3-4 days, Linguistics (grades 4-12) - 3 days, Reading Comprehension (report form, story form, & story form for literature)-2 days each, and Written Expression-3 days. Model C consists of DVD inservice, high quality DVDs in which the program's author, Victoria Greene, explicitly and systematically presents the curriculum through model teaching.

Research Support for Project Read



Project Read, developed by Mary Lee Enfield, PhD and Victoria Greene in 1969 as an alternative to the district's basal reading program, was originally designed for students in the Bloomington Public Schools who were performing below the 25th percentile. In a pilot study in the 1969-70 school year, 45 students in low reading groups from one school were matched by grade, gender, reading placement, group intelligence test scores, and Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test scores to 45 students from a comparable school within the same district. Students in both groups were given the Jastak Wide Range Achievement Test and the Gates-McKillop Paragraph Reading Test prior to the beginning of the study. Treatment students

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were in two classrooms each in grades 1, 2, and 3 where the program was administered through demonstration/model teaching for 30 minutes per day for three weeks. After the initial 3 weeks, the classroom teacher in the treatment school continued to implement *Project Read* for the rest of the year. The control group students remained in the district-wide basal reading program. Comparison of mean results indicated that *Project Read* students made more than a year's gain (1.2) compared with control students' .6 grade gain. Well-matched comparison-group studies of this type can be valuable in generating hypotheses about effective interventions, but results must be confirmed in randomized controlled trials.

Based on the results of the pilot study, the Bloomington Public Schools implemented *Project Read* in all 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade classrooms. A three-year study evaluated student progress in decoding, comprehension, and spelling for 665 randomly selected students who fell below the 25th percentile on the Jastak Wide Range Achievement Reading and Spelling Test and who scored at or above 90 on group intelligence measures (the Cognitive Abilities Test, Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test, Weschler Intelligent Scale for Children or Stanford Binet). Students were evaluated yearly and a final report assembled at the end of the study. Evaluations were based on the Jastak Wide Range Achievement Tests-Reading and Spelling Sections, the Gates MacGinitie Reading Survey-Vocabulary and Comprehension, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Chi square analyses used to determine if student outcomes were significant revealed that first, second, and third grade students in the treatment group made significant progress in achievement in reading and spelling skills over a three-year period as measured by standardized achievement tests. This study, however, did not employ a control group or a matched comparison group, so it is not possible to directly attribute the reading growth these students experienced to *Project Read* alone.

In the 1986-87 school year, a study was conducted in an upper-Midwest district in which all first, second, and third grade students who were predicted by their teachers to be 'at-risk' of reading failure were included in the sample. Students were identified by IQ, age, and reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test (1982). Control group students were identified as being at-risk in the year prior to the first full year of the intervention's implementation. Analyses of outcome data indicated significant differences in word study skills, word reading, reading comprehension, and total reading between the 1st grade *Project Read* intervention group and the 1st grade control group students, but no significant difference for 2nd or 3rd grades.

In 2002 Bruce, Snodgrass, and Salzman published a descriptive study of eleven 1st grade students identified by their teachers as 'at-risk' for learning to read. Placed in an inclusive classroom with a classroom teacher and a Title I reading teacher, these students were tested in the beginning of the year using Clay's Observational Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (1993); all scored below the fourth stanine on most of the seven tests of literacy skills. Intervention reading instruction included a combination of *Project Read* and Guided Reading. In the spring of the year, analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between students' pre- and posttest scores on word identification, writing vocabulary, sentence dictation, and text level comprehension. Post intervention stanine scores were higher than pre-intervention scores for all 11 students. Similar to the second study described in this section, this study showed that the students made significant progress in learning to read, but the absence of a control group makes it difficult to determine if the growth they experienced was due to the unique instructional features of the Project Read curriculum.

In conclusion, available studies of the effectiveness of *Project Read* are promising and the instructional strategies of *Project Read* are aligned with current research. Future

studies with sound experimental designs including control groups and random assignment may contribute more definitive information about the efficacy of *Project Read*.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Project Read*:

- The scope and sequence is detailed, clear, and encompasses the five components of reading.
- Sound-symbol organizational and spelling generalization charts provide explicit visuals for categorizing information.
- Explicit teacher materials are very user-friendly, and the accompanying DVDs provide demonstrations of instructional lessons.
- Students are provided with ample practice reading decodable stories and more sophisticated text.
- Visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile strategies within the instructional format may be motivating for many students.
- Explicit instruction in the use of syllable types supports advanced decoding and word attack skills.
- Teacher resources and training provide the teacher with tools needed to understand the rationale for the instructional approach.

Weaknesses of *Project Read*:

- None were noted.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Project Read?

Hillsborough 813-272-4050
Sarasota 941-927-9000

For More Information

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

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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