

How We Teach Reading at Tally PS

Created by Liss Lothian, Literacy Leader - 2021



At Tally PS, we want every child to be a successful reader. Reading is an essential skill that, despite what we often perceive as adults, is an extremely complex task.

Know Better, Do Better

Tally PS is currently on a learning journey. We have been undertaking significant professional development around the **'Science of Reading'**. We are listening to the latest research about what is best practice and evidence-based when it comes to teaching students to read.

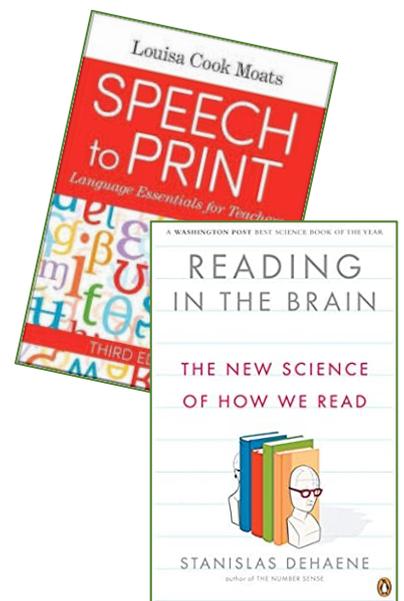
Research is telling us that our current reading practices only cater for around 60% of students – *and this is not good enough!* Too many students have 'moved through the levels' but do not actually possess the ability to read complex texts. Often at around Grade 3, students' reading progress plateaus as poor reading practices have not given them the skills required to develop into proficient readers. According to research, around 95% of students will have reading success if evidence-based instruction is utilised instead.

Unlike speech, reading does not occur naturally. It is a process of building neuro-pathways in the brain that link sounds of speech to written symbols (letters). Decades of research shows that each person stores this knowledge in a part of their brain referred to as the 'letterbox'. This process of storing letter-sound correspondences is called orthographic mapping. Guessing words based on context does not aid in orthographic mapping, phonic decoding does.



The Science of Reading

"The body of work referred to as the "science of reading" is not an ideology, a philosophy, a political agenda, a one-size-fits-all approach, a program of instruction, nor a specific component of instruction. It is the emerging consensus from many related disciplines, based on literally thousands of studies, supported by hundreds of millions of research dollars, conducted across the world in many languages. These studies have revealed a great deal about how we learn to read, what goes wrong when students don't learn, and what kind of instruction is most likely to work the best for the most students." - **Dr. Louisa Moats**



Changes in 2021

If your family has been a part of Tally PS for some time, you will notice many changes being implemented this year. We are excited to be aligning our instruction with the Science of Reading and are hopeful that we can improve reading outcomes for all students!

Terms to Understand

Code Emphasis: F-2 students will focus on acquiring the skills to 'crack the code' of our alphabet to the 44 speech sounds in English. Students need to be able to decode (sound-out) words before they can comprehend what they read.

Explicit and systematic phonics instruction: While phonics has always been part of our instruction, we now have a continuum of phonics skills to ensure that letter-sounds are explicitly and systematically taught. Students will progress through the continuum as they master skills. From Grade 3-6, the focus will shift more to word study skills such as exploring grammar and morphology (prefixes, suffixes, root words).

Phonemic awareness: Research emphasises how incredibly important it is to develop this skill! Phonemic awareness is the ability to listen, identify and manipulate sounds orally. It is important that these skills are developed first before expecting students to engage with reading texts independently.

Decodable Readers: We will now be using decodable readers in the junior classrooms rather than predictable levelled books (like the PM readers). Decodable books align with the letter-sound sequence being taught and they enable students to consolidate the phonics skills they are learning in class. We will utilise a number of different decodable series that are matched to the sequence of phonics skills being taught.

These texts should be easy! We can't challenge students when they have not yet learnt complex letter-sound relationships. The levelled readers we have used in the past contained limited language and patterned sentences that were easily memorised – this is not reading!

Questions?

We understand that change can be difficult and that you may still have unanswered questions about the practices we will be implementing. Please feel free to contact Liss Lothian to discuss this information further.

Alternatively, online information, research articles and hardcopy literature can be shared with families wishing to upskill their knowledge in this area. 😊



Multi-cueing: This practice encourages students to use strategies other than decoding to 'read'. Deciding if a word makes sense, if it looks right or sounds right are strategies research says we must abandon. We will not be reinforcing to children that they should guess as they read; we want them to apply their phonics knowledge to decode the letters and sounds on the page.

Sight Words: We will no longer be using lists of sight words as these encourage students to try to memorise words and to guess when they are not sure – strategies we do not want to reinforce. In the F-2 grades, students will instead be given high frequency words to practise. These high frequency words will be matched to letters students have been explicitly taught in class, organised by orthographic similarity (eg. me, be, she / that, this, then) and they will be explicitly taught in class. In the past, sight words turned into a competition to move through the lists. This generally showed memorisation skills rather than true decoding ability.

If a child memorises ten words, the child can read only ten words, but if a child learns the sounds of ten letters, the child will be able to read 350 three sound words, 4320 four sound words and 21,650 five sound words.

Comprehension: Reading comprehension only occurs when students have developed the ability to 'get the words off the page' (decoding). They also require general knowledge, a broad vocabulary and a good understanding of how language works. We will also be supporting these areas within our daily reading instruction.