

Investment Alone Does Not Improve Literacy Outcomes

*What levels the
playing field for
all students?*

1

Why are so many students not reading at grade level by Grade 3?

The answer lies in how well they accessed literacy foundations in earlier years.

However, the more important question is do students have the literacy foundations they need to engage successfully with reading and writing instruction as classroom demands increase.

Reading and writing do not develop from exposure alone. They depend on knowledge that must be built deliberately and systematically.

When these foundations are not in place, students can appear engaged and capable while instruction continues to move forward past them.

Research shows that students who are successful in the early years of school are the

ones who are the most successful in higher grades.

In the early years, students need to develop strong oral language and vocabulary knowledge, sound awareness, sound–letter knowledge, and an understanding of how print works. These are the crucial foundations for the development of literacy skills and knowledge.

When gaps form early, they widen over time.

The speech-to-sound-to-print approach builds these foundations by starting with the language students already have and helping them connect spoken language to sounds and sounds to print in ways that are meaningful and memorable.

2

What foundations need to be in place when students start Kindergarten for them to successfully access ELA instruction?

Many students begin Kindergarten without the literacy foundations they need to successfully access ELA instruction.

When these foundations are not in place, educators need to teach them quickly and intentionally, alongside current ELA instruction, to accelerate progress from the start.

The strongest starting point for early literacy is the language children already have.

Using words they know, children learn to hear and work with sounds in words and to connect sounds to letters and letter patterns. This

approach progresses **from language** knowledge (what children already know) **to literacy** knowledge (what they are learning about).

Research tells us that literacy grows from oral language, vocabulary knowledge, sound analysis skills, letter–name and sound–letter knowledge, and book and print knowledge.

These are the foundations for literacy. Exposure to them is not enough. They need to be taught explicitly, and we need to be confident they are secure.

3

How can literacy instruction be strengthened so more students are successful in Grade 3 and beyond?

Many students learn literacy skills without really understanding how to apply those skills to reading and writing.

Students may learn to segment and blend sounds, to recognize spelling patterns, and to complete literacy activities **without understanding how those skills help them read and write.**

Some students make the connections easily. Many do not.

Students need to build an understanding of how spoken and written language works.

Knowledge that is taught in isolation does not reliably transfer to reading and writing. Many students entering Grade 3 have learned a lot of details about written English but **they have no idea how to use them.**

Learning to read and learning to write are related but different processes. When we write, we turn spoken words into print. When we read, we translate print back into spoken words. Both require sound analysis skills and knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relationships, but each process requires this knowledge to be used in different ways.

The speech-to-sound-to-print approach helps students build a system for understanding how spoken and written words work. It teaches students to connect spoken language to sounds and sounds to print in ways that are meaningful, transferable, and memorable.

This approach supports students to write and read words fluently and to use their growing knowledge and skills to make sense of written English.

Students taught using the speech-to-sound-to-print approach can write any word in their spoken vocabulary.



Once upon a time there lived a tooth fairy called Ruby the Gold Fairy. She lived in a palace that is red and gold. It is a fairy school. There is a lot of fairies in the school. They learnt how to fly fast. They take the tooth and then they leave the doll and when they have a new tooth they make a necklace and when the child gets another tooth out they get a necklace. They have fairy dust that they make from glitter. They used their wand to make it. They sprinkled the fairy dust around the world and it grows into trees.

Ruby the Tooth Fairy

Once upon a time, there lived a tooth fairy called Ruby the gold fairy. She lived in a palace that is red and gold. It is a fairy school. There is a lot of fairies in the school. They learned how to fly fast. They take the tooth and then they leave the doll, and when they have enough teeth, they make a necklace, and when the child gets enough teeth out, they get a necklace. They have fairy dust that they make from glitter. They used their wand to make it. They sprinkled the fairy dust around the world, and it grows into trees.

Girl, 5 years 4 months



In the weekend I had a hair cut. It went big to small and after I had a hair cut I looked in the mirror. I had short hair. When I stroked my hand back my hair felt fuzzy and when I stroked my hand forwards it felt flat. I think short hair will last till Christmas. I like it very much.

My Hair Cut

In the weekend, I had a haircut. It went big to small, and after I had a haircut, I looked in the mirror. I had short hair. When I stroked my hand back, my hair felt fuzzy, and when I stroked my hand forwards, it felt flat. I think short hair will last till Christmas. I like it very much.

Boy, 5 years 11 months

4

What does effective literacy instruction look like in practice?

The best way to teach something new is to link it to prior knowledge. Start with what students already know and build from there.

Learning to read and write means understanding how the spoken word is translated into print.

Using students' spoken language (their prior knowledge) as the foundation for learning how written language works (the new learning) is an effective approach that accelerates literacy learning.

Students begin with words they can already say.

They move from their known spoken language to learning unknown concepts of written language.

In Kindergarten, students learn that the same sound can be written in different ways.

For example, finding the **/k/** sound in the names of children in the class might show that **/k/** is written with **c** in *Catherine*, **k** in *Katie*, **ck** in *Jack*, and **cc** in *Rocco*. The idea that sounds can be written with one or more letters and that the same sound can be written in different ways is easy to understand using names as a starting point.

They are beginning to build a system for understanding how written English works.

In Grades 1–2, students build deeper knowledge of the relationships between sounds and spelling patterns. They learn to work with multisyllabic

words and begin to learn some of the reasons why words are spelled the way they are.

For example, they learn why the letter **c** in *Cynthia* sounds like **/s/** but in *Catherine* it sounds like **/k/**; why the **/k/** in *cat* is written with **c**, but the **/k/** in *kitten* it is written with **k**; why hopping has two **p**'s but hoping has only one.

They are adding knowledge and strategies to their understanding of how written English works.

From around Grade 3 onward, students encounter longer, more complex, and often unfamiliar words across the curriculum. Reading and writing unfamiliar multisyllabic words requires solid foundational knowledge of the alphabetic code and strategies for tackling writing and decoding these words.

Without foundational knowledge being secure and fluent, students will struggle to write words they know but cannot spell, which means they may limit the language they use for writing.

If limited code knowledge makes decoding unfamiliar words slow and difficult, comprehension will be impacted. Students may avoid reading because it is effortful: they can't remember what they read and they don't enjoy it.

"I can read it ... but I can't remember it."

When students are not explicitly taught how spoken words become print, too many reach Grade 3 without the knowledge they need to read and write with confidence.

5

How do educators know what is secure, what is missing, and what needs to be taught next?

Most districts have plenty of assessment data.

The real question is whether that data helps educators clearly see what is secure, where learning is unfinished, and what needs to be taught next.

Assessment should help educators make better instructional decisions, not simply report on progress.

Students rely on educators to know what is secure, what is missing, and what comes next.

Educators need assessment information they can trust so they can respond with precision and monitor whether instruction is making a difference.

Without this clarity, students can move through the system with the gaps in their knowledge undiscovered and their learning unfinished.

The goal is not more assessment. The goal is valid and reliable assessment information that gives educators clarity and confidence about what to teach next.

6

What will help more students successfully access Tier 1 core literacy instruction?

Tier 1 instruction needs to be strong to reduce the number of students needing extra support.

Core literacy programs are increasingly aligned with the science of reading and include explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics.

Yet many students still struggle to apply this knowledge successfully in reading and writing.

Students retain new literacy learning when lessons are explicitly and intentionally connected to words they already know.

Literacy instruction can seem overwhelming if new knowledge is not taught alongside a system for understanding it and if it is not connected to what students already know.

Language is the foundation for literacy. The missing piece in literacy instruction is starting with language students already know, connecting this language to sounds, and sounds to print — a strategy that builds an understanding of how written words work.

Beginning with words that students can already say makes the learning meaningful. Those words become the content of the lesson. As students contribute language, they help expand learning for one another. They hear sounds in familiar words and connect these sounds to letters and spelling patterns.

When literacy skills are taught as part of a connected process rather than as isolated activities, students are more able to use what they are learning in reading and writing.

The speech-to-sound-to-print approach strengthens Tier 1 core instruction by engaging all students and by helping them develop a deeper understanding of how spoken and written English works.

The goal is not to replace core instruction. It is to enhance it.

7

How can schools and families work together to strengthen literacy learning?

Many families want to support their children's literacy learning but are often unsure what to do and how to help them in the right way.

There is an opportunity to make literacy learning easier for families to understand and support at home.

When families understand how spoken language connects to sounds, and how sounds connect to print, they can support practice in ways that align directly with classroom instruction.

Families do not need to become literacy experts to make a meaningful difference.

Simple, engaging games and activities connected to classroom learning can help students practice, consolidate, and apply what they are being taught at school. This creates a stronger partnership between school and home, so students experience a more connected and consistent approach to literacy learning.

The goal is to equip families with practical, manageable ways to support literacy learning at home so more students develop the knowledge, practice, and confidence needed for long-term reading and writing success.

8

What do we need to do now to ensure more students read on grade level and stay on track to graduate?

Districts are already investing significant time, resources, and professional learning into literacy improvement. What needs strengthening now is the connection between core instruction, assessment, and support.

The speech-to-sound-to-print approach connects and enhances literacy instruction across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 by helping students build a system for understanding how written words work.

Across grade levels, educators need practical assessment information that shows what students know, what needs to be taught next, and where gaps need to be filled quickly before they widen further.

When the speech-to-sound-to-print approach is used across classrooms and at all levels of support, students keep building on what is familiar instead of starting again with unfamiliar and often disconnected instruction.

Indicators of successful literacy instruction:

- Lessons start with students' spoken vocabulary so new learning connects.
- Students can confidently write (but not necessarily spell) any words in their spoken vocabularies.
- Students can confidently decode unfamiliar multisyllabic words in content areas that are new to them.
- Instructional strategies are connected across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 lessons.
- Assessments identify strengths and gaps and are used to inform next-steps instruction.

When the speech-to-sound-to-print approach is connected across grade levels, more students can access Tier 1 core instruction, build the literacy knowledge they need, and stay on track for grade-level writing and reading.

9

How do leaders know whether current practice is developing the literacy knowledge students need?

Not all approaches that claim to support literacy lead to improved outcomes for students. Many approaches are described as evidence-based because they draw on research.

Evidence-based is not enough.

- **Evidence-based:** informed by research about literacy learning
- **Evidence-proven:** shown through evidence that the approach improves outcomes for students

An approach can be evidence-based and still not improve student outcomes.

Speech-to-sound-to-print: An evidence-proven, assessment-driven approach

The *Shine* Literacy Project measured the impact of the speech-to-sound-to-print approach on the literacy achievement of Kindergarten and Grade 1 students. It showed that it is possible to accelerate students' progress, even if they come to school without a solid foundation of early literacy knowledge.

Success was not linked to students' ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

The change of approach used by trial teachers leveled the playing field for all students.

Older students with gaps in foundational knowledge showed similar accelerated literacy progress using the same approach.

Regardless of other instructional programs being used, the speech-to-sound-to-print approach has been proven to strengthen core literacy instruction by connecting the key skills and knowledge that are critical for literacy success.

Leaders need confidence that an approach is not only aligned with research but is evidence-proven — it improves outcomes in practice.



Shine research



CUYC research



“Joy’s work in developing the literacy skills of our children is so important and so impactful, because it honors the language they speak.”

– **Dr. Pedro Noguera** Distinguished Professor of Education
Dean, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California



“The data from [the *Shine*] project indicate that this approach is related to impressive gains made by the trial group for key literacy outcome variables, including reading comprehension, reading accuracy, word identification, and spelling.”

– **Professor Sir James Chapman** Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology
Massey University, New Zealand

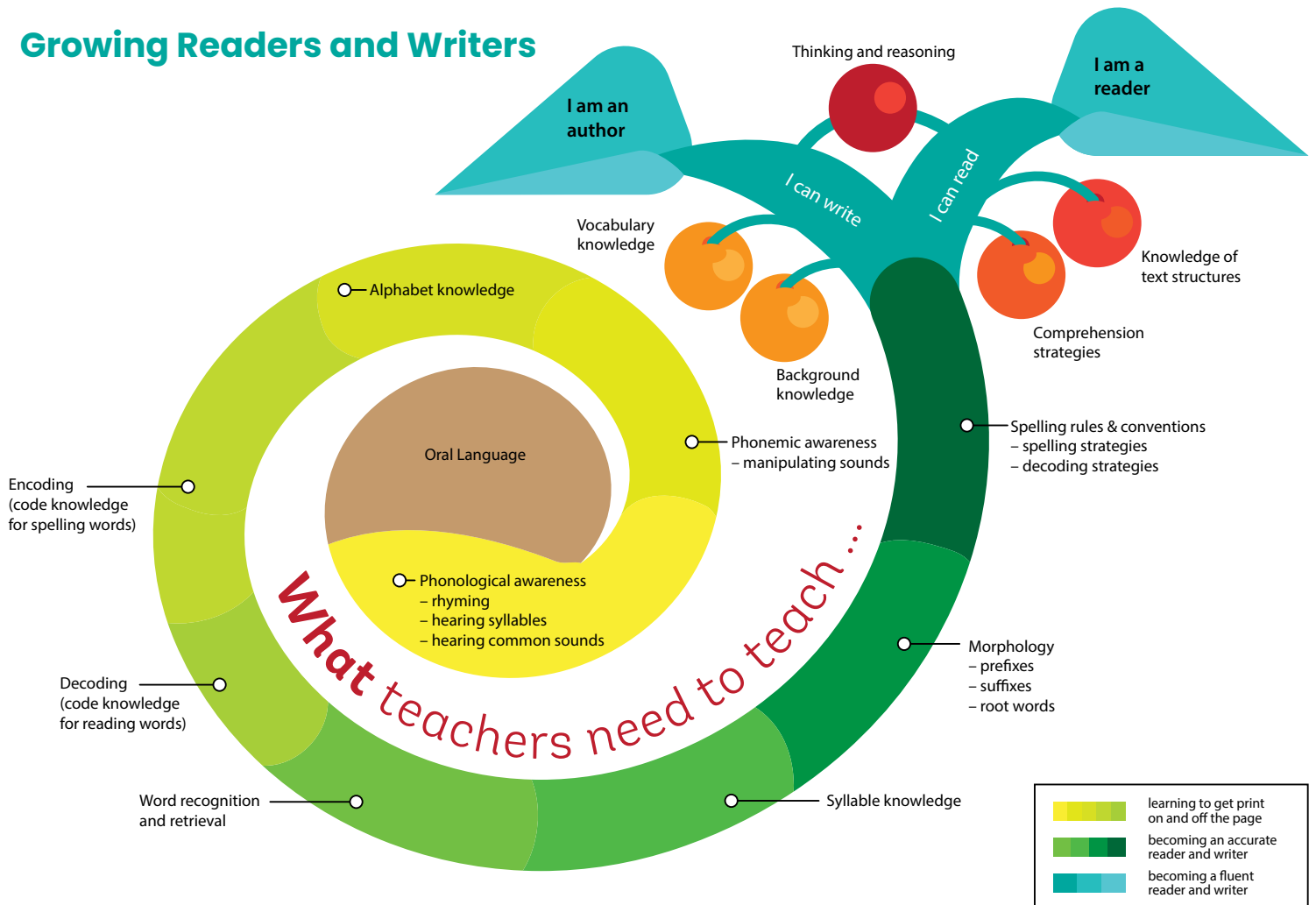


“Thank goodness for authors like Joy Allcock who get the messages right — and for her relentless focus across many books on teaching the skills for learning to read, write, and spell. She notes that learning these skills depends on knowledge and skills about print and oral language. The latter is so often forgotten.”

– **Dr. John Hattie** Director, Melbourne Educational Research Institute
The University of Melbourne, Australia. Author, *Visible Learning for Teachers*

We want all students reading and writing at grade level.

Growing Readers and Writers



© 2025 Code-Ed Ltd. Developed by Joy Allcock www.code-ed.co.nz

What literacy knowledge is not yet secure?

