

SCIENCE OF READING IMPLEMENTATION

BRIEF #4

ALIGNING SCIENCE of READING PRACTICES ACROSS EDUCATORS TEACHING CORE CONTENT, EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN, MULTILINGUAL, and **ACADEMICALLY** and **INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED** **STUDENTS**

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INTRODUCTION

Struggling readers receive a range of targeted services and are often pulled out of class or receive small-group, in-class support by someone other than their primary teacher. One implementation challenge that can arise with meeting North Carolina's expectation that students receive instruction that is aligned with the Science of Reading (SoR) is getting all professionals supporting students, especially those supporting struggling readers, using the same research-based approach for literacy instruction. These professionals include core content, exceptional children, multilingual, and academically and intellectually gifted program teachers.

North Carolina's [Excellent Public Schools Act](#) requires that all pre-K to fifth-grade teachers in traditional public schools complete [Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling \(LETRS\) training](#). It is at the discretion of individual districts and schools as to whether other staff members complete training. As shown in this implementation case study, when only one category of professionals, specifically classroom teachers, involved with reading instruction have completed LETRS training, there can be inconsistencies in the use and alignment of instructional practices and curriculum materials. Exposure to inconsistent and sometimes conflicting instructional strategies can make it harder for struggling readers.

During the 2023-24 academic year, after all pre-K to fifth-grade core content teachers completed LETRS training, the literacy instructional coach began to see inconsistencies in the use of SoR instructional practices. This is a school where the full instructional leadership team, including the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach, completed the training. The principal completed the less comprehensive LETRS leadership training, and the instructional coach completed the full comprehensive training as classroom teachers.

Training the entire certified staff has allowed for substantial professional learning community conversations, including alignment to research-based practices. However, during discussions regarding reading difficulties among Exceptional Children and Multilingual Learner students who received pull-out services, a trend emerged indicating inconsistencies between the instructional strategies and curriculum materials used by core teachers and those providing pull-out and intervention support.

Student outcome data show that multilingual students greatly benefit from collaboration between classroom teachers and specialists available throughout the school day. Communication is vital for this collaboration, and having dedicated collective planning time is crucial for success.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

How can a school get all professionals supporting struggling multilingual students (core teachers and those who provide pull-out and inclusion services) to utilize a similar set of SoR-aligned instructional practices?

This problem of practice was selected because the district did not yet have clear guidelines for curriculum expectations within the multilingual department, and no formal alignment between multilingual and core instruction. Multilingual students are those whose native first language is not English and are learning English as their second or third language. To address the lack of alignment, the school is taking intentional steps to work with the multilingual teacher to improve instructional strategies and collaboration across all the staff who provide core and supplemental reading instruction. Alignment is crucial as all students, including multilingual learners, must take the state-mandated literacy assessment. Currently, 28% of the school's population receives multilingual services, and approximately 32 students per grade level (K-3) are pulled out of core reading instruction to receive multilingual services.

During the 2023-24 academic year, this literacy coach engaged in twice-monthly meetings as part of the Science of Reading Implementation Fellowship. This Fellowship was guided by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, four North Carolina university professors who are literacy experts, and NC-DPI's Assistant Director of Early Literacy. The fellowship enabled her to tackle this problem of practice by providing time to connect with colleagues and brainstorm. She collected valuable research to present to her school's administrative team and learned applied teaching and planning strategies to take back to coaching meetings with teachers.

The primary change that resulted from consistent engagement with this problem of practice is a school-wide shift toward greater alignment in providing reading instruction grounded in the SoR as students move across grade levels and various pull-out supports. Teachers increased their use of data from weekly professional learning community meetings to identify which students need supplemental support. These meetings were changed to include the multilingual teacher to ensure that individualized interventions align with the SoR and with core classroom instruction.

SCHOOL CONTEXT

This problem of practice was taken up in a kindergarten through third-grade school with a student body of 5% White, 28% Hispanic, 44% Black, 14% American Indian, and 10% multiracial. In the school, 76% of students are economically disadvantaged. The percentage of Multilingual Learners has increased in recent years, and currently, 28% of the student population has EL status. The majority of the staff (81%) are experienced teachers.

As noted above, this school is committed to aligning instruction with the SoR. This school was included in the first cohort of educators who completed LETRS training in 2021. They immediately adapted their reading curriculum to align it with the SoR and are currently in their second year of implementation. Each K-2 teacher has a one-hour structured phonics block dedicated to tailoring reading instruction to meet the needs of all students. The school aims to train teachers to analyze data, discuss it, and use it in planning daily classroom instruction. School administrators are actively engaged in daily discussions and activities with classroom teachers. Daily walk-through data shows that most teachers monitor reading instruction using formative assessments that provide immediate feedback, allowing them to customize instruction daily.

The school's instructional leadership team meets weekly to review data, support teachers, and review current goals and expectations. Each team member also supports and coaches teachers within grade-level team meetings in addition to weekly professional learning community meetings. These initiatives have improved the teaching practices and staff commitment to using SoR-aligned instructional practices. Every teacher has a road map to

the different phases of reading, which is discussed weekly with the Instructional Leadership Team. During these discussions, decisions are made regarding whether each student's small group reading support assignment should be changed based on their needs and whether additional resources and interventions are needed. Additionally, rubrics and notes are reviewed to determine the next steps for whole-class and individualized instruction. It is important to note that there are gaps in the instructional leadership team's abilities to identify deficits in reading and guiding teachers in their use of SoR because the LETRS leadership training is a limited version of the comprehensive training that teachers receive. This limits school administrators' abilities to support implementation.

RESEARCH-INFORMED UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Research informs us that there are [benefits to alignment across core teachers and those providing pull-out intervention](#). Student outcome data show that multilingual students greatly benefit from [collaboration between classroom teachers and specialists available throughout the school day](#). Communication is vital for this collaboration, and having dedicated collective planning time is crucial for success. Schools with collaborative structures that enable administrators, classroom teachers, intervention specialists, and other professionals to engage in shared decision-making can quickly implement practices supporting multilingual students. Routine communication across all stakeholders and collective examination of student data are essential to creating a shared understanding of multilingual students' needs.

Research also shows that [data-based decision-making practices that are recommended for native English speakers should also be used for multilingual students](#). This is because, like native English speakers, not all multilingual students have the same learning challenges when struggling with reading. For example, some multilingual students have good knowledge of words in their native language but don't yet have word decoding skills in their native language or in English, and other multilingual students have both a strong vocabulary and can decode words in their native language. Both groups of children may struggle to read English, but need different interventions.



Even though the specialists who provide pull-out services for multilingual students are not required to complete LETRS training, their exposure to SoR-aligned instructional practices is just as important. [They benefit from explicit teaching of literacy components, such as phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing](#). Multilingual students need to learn how to map spoken sounds to written letters and develop phonics skills to improve decoding, just like native English speakers.

The use of assessments to understand multilingual students' intervention needs cannot be overstated. [Many multilingual students require practice with English phonemes that may not exist in their native language](#). These students can only progress to the phonological learning stage once familiar with all English sounds. Providing systematic SoR-aligned instruction is effective for multilingual learners. The more they struggle to read, the more likely they are to spend time with multilingual specialists who, as noted above, are not required to complete LETRS training, and less time with their primary teacher.

CAPACITY BUILDING & CONVERSATIONS THAT CREATED CHANGE

During professional learning community meetings, conversations occurred at both the administrative level and the level of classroom teachers and instructional coaches. In administrative discussions, research articles on the SoR and LETRS training facilitated meaningful conversations to establish the urgency of aligning teaching practices across the various professionals who support students.



As the school began to prioritize analyzing data and understanding students' individualized needs, the low performance of multilingual students prompted more educators to consider changing their current practices for these students. As they examined [mCLASS](#) data to pinpoint students' areas of struggle, there was noticeable misalignment in decoding and vocabulary skills. Other data used with teachers came from the weekly cycle assessments in the Multilingual Education Skills Block.

During professional learning community meetings, guiding questions were developed by the school's leadership team to explore multilingual students and their lagging skills in decoding and vocabulary. These weekly meetings led staff to a solid first step in holding conversations around what students need to support their foundations in literacy. Teachers referred to their resources from LETRS Volume II Session 6 during these conversations. Regarding teaching students of special populations, the multilingual teacher worked with the school to show how [WIDA data \(English proficiency tests for multilingual learners\)](#) aligns with practices learned in LETRS, which helped hesitant staff recognize the daily need for alignment between multilingual students' core and pull-out reading instruction. What emerged from these conversations were clear steps of how WIDA supports the work in addressing oral language and vocabulary needs, one of the alignment areas the school is focused on.

FOSTERING CHANGE IN THE COMING ACADEMIC YEARS

This is just the first step in getting the staff on board with understanding how instructional practices for multilingual learners can be aligned with the SoR across all professionals. There is now a general understanding of why change is needed and the direction to go when working with multilingual students. However, more conversations and training will be needed in the coming academic years to build a cohesive unit between core and multilingual teachers, who are currently two separate departments.

As staff plan for upcoming school years, the following questions can be considered to advance change:

- How can a lesson plan rooted in research-based practices support core and pull-out services?
- Where can the school add small, recurring blocks of time for core and multilingual teachers to come together?
- How can professional learning communities and grade-level planning times be adjusted to facilitate daily and weekly collaborative conversations?

RESOURCES FOR STRENGTHENING AND ALIGNING READING INSTRUCTION FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

- [BELLA Teacher Professional Learning](#)
- [Navigating the ESL Classroom: A Guide to Push-in and Pull-out Strategies](#)
- [Rethinking Push-In Pull-Out: The Cause for Sheltered Co-Teaching - ELL Strategies](#)
- [Integrating ELL Students in General Education Classes](#)

SERIES OF BRIEFS

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Lessons Along the Pathway to
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In North Carolina Classrooms

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Science of Reading and the
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Lower and Upper Elementary
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BRIEF #6

Creating Whole School Change
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BRIEF #7

Role of Parents In Advocating
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BRIEF 8

Using the “Science of
Implementation” to Implement
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