INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background
From 2002–03 to 2005–06 steady gains were made in primary reading in Ontario, as measured by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments. The percentage of students achieving at the provincial standard increased from 54 percent to 64 percent. However, from 2006–07 to 2009–10 the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the provincial standard remained unchanged.

In recognition of the complexity of reading instruction as both an art and a science, the Ministry of Education responded to the plateau in primary reading in a number of different ways:

- Since 2006, schools with large percentages of students achieving well below the provincial standard have been supported through the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP). With this support the number of very low achieving schools has decreased from 250 schools out of approximately 4000 in 2006 to 126 schools in 2010.

- In September 2009 the ministry invited a group of university researchers and educators to provide advice to ministry personnel about evidence-based practices for strengthening reading skills in the primary years.

- During the 2009–10 school year, the Student Work Study Teacher (SWST) initiative was established to take a closer look at students whose reading achievement was at level 2 and who were likely to progress to level 3 only with the aid of supports tailored to their individual needs. The SWSTs focused on examining student work and uncovering student thinking in order to better understand the teaching practices that would be effective in supporting learners and bringing about improved student achievement. During the 2010–11 school year the SWSTs focused on student work and student thinking in primary reading and junior mathematics, and a small number of SWSTs studied the performance and thinking of students whose work showed evidence of progressing from level 3 to level 4.

- Since 2006, the webcasts listed in the chart below have been developed to illustrate effective instruction and pedagogy.
The following multimedia resources and monographs have been produced to support school- and system-based professional learning focused on strengthening reading instruction:

- **Primary Assessment: Lessons Learned from Kindergarten/Grade 1 Collaborative Inquiry**
- **Reading Fluency**
- **Grand Conversations in Primary Classrooms**
- **Critical Literacy**
- **Integrated Learning in the Classroom**
- **Integrated Curriculum - What Works? Research into Practice**
- **Let’s Talk about Listening**
- **Bolstering Resilience in Students: Teachers as Protective Factors, What Works? Research into Practice**

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Thinking about Thinking: Setting the Stage for Independent Reading (K–2)

Word Study Instruction

Kindergarten to Grade 4 literacy leaders from all English-language school districts have received direct support through web conferences and face-to-face sessions focused on improved classroom instruction.

The Early Primary Collaborative Initiative (EPCI) examined the effects of teaching practice on student learning, finding that approaches that make thinking and learning “visible” are most effective.

In early 2011, leadership teams from all English-language boards participating in Schools in the Middle (SIM) sessions were engaged in focused learning conversations about how to improve primary reading.

The initiatives and interventions listed above, along with the work of district school boards, schools, and teachers, have made a significant impact on teaching and learning. That said, we need to continue our focus on primary reading.

In the fall of 2010, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat established a Primary Reading Working Group. The group’s mandate was to draw on both professional practice in Ontario and current research to probe more deeply into the factors that contribute to system, school, and classroom successes and challenges related to primary reading, and make recommendations for next steps. This discussion paper outlines the group’s findings.

1.2 The Purpose of This Discussion Paper

The main purpose of this discussion paper is to promote professional inquiry into primary reading and to:

- outline perspectives on effective primary reading instruction and pedagogy put forward by Ontario educators and supported by current research;
- suggest possible action steps, for implementation starting in winter 2011, to bring about improvements in primary reading achievement;
- continue to strengthen and focus the supports provided for students in Kindergarten and the primary grades within comprehensive literacy programs.

This paper is intended to be used by districts, schools, primary divisions, and grade teams, in concert with other key resources, such as the School Effectiveness Framework, to take stock and promote inquiry and reflection about current practice. Questions that may be useful in supporting such an inquiry process include the following:

- On the basis of what student work is telling us, which elements of quality reading instruction might need to be introduced, bolstered, or refined? What specific evidence supports this finding? How will these elements be strengthened or refined? If no particular elements need to be addressed, what are the next steps to further improvement?

A student who can’t read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time. Hernandez, 2010
If an element needs to be added, refined, or used more consistently across classrooms, then discussion might revolve around the following:

Do we understand this element of reading at a deep level?
Which students need this instruction?
What pedagogy will best support student learning?
What evidence will demonstrate that student learning has improved?

### 1.3 Methods and Approaches Used

The members of the Primary Reading Working Group met on a regular basis over a six-month period to gather and compile insights and lessons learned about primary reading. We functioned as a small professional learning team engaged in collaborative inquiry and drew on the expertise not only of our members but also of educators across the province. In addition, we relied heavily on current research evidence identified in a modest literature review and also on the research foundations that underpin the K–12 School Effectiveness Framework (SEF), as outlined in the document by the same name (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Specifically, we sought advice and input from the following:

- representatives from EQAO
- teams from five English-language and two French-language districts that had significant improvement in achievement in primary reading over a two-year period. Collectively, the focus groups included supervisory officers, School Effectiveness Leads, consultants, teachers, literacy coaches, and a speech and language pathologist.
- the primary division in an elementary school with a large Grade 3 cohort that made significant gains in primary reading, moving from 76% of students achieving at the provincial standard to 85%.
- the team leader responsible for New Zealand’s Literacy, Design and Operational Policy

In addition, we learned from the following:

- the report of the Student Work Study Initiative
- the report of the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership
- the report of the Early Primary Collaborative
- the report of the Literacy Leaders Provincial Collaborative Inquiry
- the K–12 School Effectiveness Framework
- a review of current research on primary reading
Although our focus as a working group was on primary reading, we also needed to keep in mind the context within which primary reading is embedded – the instructional core. The prism diagram below, taken from the K–12 School Effectiveness Framework, provides a visual representation of the instructional core. It illustrates that primary reading instruction and pedagogy do not exist in isolation but are influenced by provincial direction, district priorities, and school improvement efforts acting together in support of classroom instruction.

Although each component within the prism – the province, the district, and the school – makes valuable and essential contributions to effective reading instruction, this report takes the view that the quality of the instructional core as a whole determines the quality of student learning and achievement. The individuals and groups with whom the working group consulted, along with the literature it reviewed, encompassed the perspectives of representatives of all the components of the prism.

The document K–12 School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is a support to the school and classroom components of the prism. The SEF provides indicators and samples of evidence that can be used to create an environment for both teaching and learning that effectively supports student achievement and well-being. Use of the SEF therefore can have a powerful influence on the instructional core.
2.1 SYSTEM-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

System leaders consulted by the Working Group emphasized the importance of building a collective sense of purpose and a focus on early reading to establish a common understanding of what literacy learning means and how it is supported and developed within schools. Board-wide alignment and consistency in messaging about literacy learning from Kindergarten to Grade 3 was seen as critical. In many cases extensive professional learning focusing on reading instruction was needed, for both teachers and principals.

At the system level, leaders indicated that the District Review Process outlined in the K–12 School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is used to inform resource allocation and points to the professional learning supports that are needed. Data from effective OFIP schools also suggests that implementing cycles of self-assessment and reflection, as outlined in the SEF, is key to improvement planning and successful intervention.

Districts provide the time and space for educators to engage in job-embedded professional learning, collaborative inquiry, and reflection on practice. These collaborative learning cultures, characterized by continuous inquiry and improvement, must foster “de-privatized practice” because nothing will put instruction in the spotlight as well as teachers observing other teachers (Marzano & Waters, p. 63).

Districts that have seen improvement in reading typically form networks of teachers, principals, and supervisory officers that learn from and with one another. Student learning is the focus as teams discuss, analyze, reflect on student thinking, generate next steps, and gain a clearer understanding of quality work.

Network and learning team conversations often focus on topics such as:

- connections between curriculum expectations, learning goals, and success criteria;
- the role of assessment “for”, “as”, and “of” learning;
- development of rich tasks and prompts that reflect curricular expectations, promote critical and creative thinking, and make that thinking visible.

FINDINGS – WHAT WE LEARNED

Establishing Alignment and Coherence

We created a Board Strategic Improvement Plan after seeking input from teachers and principals and focused on job embedded professional learning. We analyzed data, developed the plan, and presented the plan to the principals in order to ensure that our direction was understood. Principals presented the plan to staff and School Councils, and collaboratively developed the School Improvement Plans to align with the Board plan. We revisit the plan at principals’ meetings and provide data on progress throughout the year. This provides opportunities to continue to message the foci in the plan and ensure all are supporting the plan.

Jack McMaster, Director of Education,
Keewatin-Patricia DSB
Carol Hron, Superintendent of Education,
Keewatin-Patricia DSB

Professional development that is likely to have the biggest impact has a reciprocal relationship between the time you spend with your colleagues in classrooms trying to solve instructional problems and then reflective time outside of classrooms trying to think about what you are going to try next...you have to have the structure that allows people to get together.

Elmore, cited in Fullan, 2006
These conversations enable teachers to support students in integrating and interpreting texts, drawing conclusions, and making evaluations independently.

This is the third year ALCDSB has placed emphasis on the Emergent Writer/Reader in Kindergarten and Grade 1. Each year, professional knowledge and understanding gets closer to the student desk with artefacts of student learning – writing samples and observations of reading behaviour. System-wide, individual student PM Benchmark information is collected in the fall and at year end from Sr. Kindergarten to Grade 3. At each elementary school, the Tracking Board provides Professional Learning Communities with monthly reading record updates to inform instructional and resource decisions for their primary students.

Reading Record information from four intervals during the 2010–2011 academic year is supporting further teacher inquiry regarding text levels, and how students at the Emergent stage progress with guided instruction to independently access and communicate understanding of increasingly complex texts.

Jody DiRocco, Director of Education
Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

2.2 SCHOOL-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

A recurring message from those we consulted is the importance of professional learning communities (PLCs), in which educators work collaboratively to build a school-wide approach as they align curriculum and select assessment practices that support student learning. Teams develop a shared understanding of curriculum expectations as they deconstruct and cluster expectations to develop common understandings of the process of learning to read from Kindergarten to Grade 3. These teams engage in focused conversations that draw on both qualitative and quantitative data.

In schools that have seen improvement in reading, the progress of every student is closely monitored by the primary division team (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3), and strategic interventions are designed, implemented, and monitored to support continued student learning that leads to independent practice. Instruction and interventions offered across instructional settings and contexts is responsive to student needs and is coherent and mutually reinforcing. Interventions augment effective classroom practice.

In these schools, goals and expected levels for reading achievement are clearly stated and communicated to all. Entire school communities are involved in bringing students to high levels of achievement. Positive home–school relationships are fostered to support student learning. Human and other resources are allocated in a way that supports identified student needs, and professional learning opportunities are available to improve reading instruction and pedagogy.

Enhanced reading proficiency rests largely on the capacity of classroom teachers to provide expert, exemplary reading instruction – instruction that cannot be packaged or regurgitated from a common script because it is responsive to children’s needs.

Allington, 2002

Parental aspirations and expectations for children’s educational achievement has the strongest relationship with achievement (.80), according to John Hattie (2010). He goes on to say that “parents need to hold high aspirations and expectations for their children, and schools need to work in partnership with parents to make their expectations appropriately high and challenging and then work in partnership with children and the home to realize, and even surpass, these expectations” (p. 70).

Bryk et al., 2010 (p. 51)
2.3 CLASSROOM-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers with whom we consulted consistently mentioned that the focus of their instruction was determined by their ongoing assessments of every student in their class. Individual and small-group instruction allowed them to focus on the skills that their assessments indicated were most in need of support.

This section of the discussion paper covers the discrete cognitive foundations that research has found to be essential to reading acquisition. Although skills may be taught in isolation, they must always be applied in real reading contexts.

2.3.1 Looking to the Research: The Four Resources Model (Four Families of Practice)

The working group has organized this section of the report around the four resources model (see Appendix 4.1), developed by Luke and Freebody (1990), because it is a model that is used widely across Ontario. The model describes the four ways in which readers make meaning from texts, and so can be used to discuss the four areas that teachers must consider for effective reading instruction. It posits the following four families of practice:

- Code user (coding competence) – i.e., practices that relate to decoding text
- Meaning maker (semantic competence) – i.e., practices that relate to making meaning from text
- Text user (pragmatic competence) – i.e., practices that relate to pragmatics, or the purpose, audience, and context of a text
- Text analyzer (critical competence) – i.e., practices that relate to critical interpretation of text

The premise of the model is that all four families of practice must be present in exemplary reading instruction. Although a number of elements within each family of practice are listed separately, proficient readers integrate all four practices simultaneously, and learning tasks need to integrate the four families of practice in meaningful ways across all subject areas. (For more information about the four families of practices, see the webcast entitled Dr. Allan Luke: The New Literacies, at www.curriculum.org.)
2.3.2 Conditions That Support All Four Families of Practice and Promote Reading Achievement

Effective reading instruction is based on assessment and the development of a profile of strengths and next steps for learning for each individual student in the class. Once the starting points are known, individual and small-group instruction is used to support each child’s individual literacy development. These strategies are followed in the primary classrooms in the boards and schools that provided input for this paper. In these boards and schools teaching is seen as a series of deliberate acts and deliberate facilitation of student learning. The SWSTs who contributed to research for this paper found that ongoing, incremental, and timely assessment moves led to continual refinement and improvement of both student work and student thinking.

According to research, “There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach” (International Reading Association, 1999). Teachers need to know the learner, respond to the learner, implement focused lessons, and reflect on both the teaching and the learning that has occurred.

Pressley (2006), in his study of effective instruction, states that “the best teachers were highly aware both of their practices and of the purposes driving those practices. There was nothing haphazard about literacy instruction in these classes.”

Districts that are seeing gains in reading achievement in the primary grades report that they are using the following strategies.

**Systematic assessment of student progress using ongoing running records.** The analysis of the running record and the use of this knowledge to inform instruction are an important part of professional learning.

Careful selection of texts plays a major role in assisting students to learn at optimal rates. Selections based on students’ interests, prior knowledge, and competencies spur their development by building upon their strengths. Teachers create small groups for text discussions and instruction based on:

- observed reading behaviours;
- student instructional needs, determined by the observed reading behaviours;
- student interests;
- level of difficulty of the text.
Teaching through the gradual release of responsibility. In this approach the teacher first explains how to use a strategy and then gives students more and more independence in practising and applying the strategy over time. Teaching approaches that demonstrate the gradual release of responsibility include modelled, shared, guided, independent practice and application to new learning (see text in box). Effective instruction incorporates these approaches across all curricular areas. (For more information, see the following webcast Quality Teaching: It’s Intentional – segment “Jeffrey Wilhelm: Gradual Release of Responsibility” and the webcast entitled and Kindergarten Matters: Planned, Purposeful, Playful Talk.)

**Modelled Practice**  
– teacher models, explains, demonstrates, thinks aloud

**Shared Practice**  
– teacher explicitly teaches, and teacher and student practise strategy together; the student gradually assumes more and more responsibility for the strategy

**Guided Practice**  
– students practise the strategy with coaching from the teacher

**Independent Practice**  
– students apply the strategy on their own and receive feedback

**Student Application**  
– students apply their learning to a new genre or format, a more difficult text, or a new situation

Oral language instruction. “Research indicates that the level of oral language skill is highly predictive of reading development and warrants aggressive intervention to prevent reading failure” (Catts, Fey, & Tomblin, 2004). It is essential to develop oral language explicitly through focused, purposeful instruction. Oral language instruction should be threaded throughout the day. It is essential that teachers have a method of assessing oral language proficiency, as students demonstrating the most delay in their oral language development will have difficulty comprehending classroom talk beyond the most basic instructions. A classroom environment rich in poetry, songs, wordplay, drama, books, language games, and lively purposeful talk builds students’ appreciation and awareness of language, and also builds the foundation for explicit instruction in the sound structure (phonology) of the English language. Many teams engaged in the Kindergarten/Grade 1 inquiry reported that they intentionally designed opportunities for oral language development, including using open-ended questioning techniques (e.g., allowing Proficiency in oral language provides children with a vital tool for thought. Without fluent and structured oral language, children will find it very difficult to think abstractly and symbolically.  
Bruner, 1983
time for students to respond); purposefully planning the classroom environment (e.g., carefully selecting materials at learning centres); building vocabulary across the curriculum; providing personalized, on-the-spot descriptive feedback; and engaging with students in assessment as learning to inform their instruction techniques.

A continuing focus on oral language development throughout the school years remains essential in supporting students as they learn to read, understand, and think about text across all curriculum areas. (For information on research regarding the importance of oral language, see Appendix 4.2 and also see “Janice Greenberg: The Importance of Talk”, from the webcast entitled Quality Teaching: It’s Intentional.)

**Accountable talk.** Students learn best when “accountable talk” (problem-posing, problem-solving talk related to curricular topics) is encouraged, modelled and supported throughout the school day. In a classroom where accountable talk is encouraged, teachers and students discuss ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies, and responses with each other. Neuman and Roskos (1997) suggest that in Junior and Senior Kindergarten, learning centres provide support for literacy learning and accountable talk through:

- the presence of people who share expertise and provide assistance;
- feedback from others;
- access to literacy tools and related supplies;
- multiple options for activity;
- problem-solving situations.

**Metacognitive development, strategy use, and self-regulation by students.** Metacognitive development can be described as the conscious development of one’s metacognitive abilities, such as moving to greater knowledge, awareness, and control of one’s learning; selecting learning strategies; monitoring the progress of learning; correcting errors; analyzing the effectiveness of strategies; and changing learning behaviours and strategies when necessary (Ridley et al., 1992). Students are explicitly taught to monitor their learning, the quality of their work, and their time on task. They are also taught strategies that good readers use, and how to fix problems that they encounter as they are reading (for more information on strategies and strategy instruction, see Appendix 4.3). Learners who have developed their metacognitive abilities have the following advantages (Wenden, 1998):

- They are more strategic in their learning.
- Their rate of progress in learning, as well as the quality and speed of their cognitive engagement, are higher.
- They are more confident in their ability to learn.
- They do not hesitate to obtain help from peers, teachers, or family when needed.
They provide accurate assessments of why they are successful learners.
They think clearly about their errors when failure occurs during an activity.
Their tactics match the learning task, and they make adjustments to reflect changing circumstances.
They perceive themselves as continual learners and can successfully cope with new situations.

**Extensive time spent reading.** Studies have shown that devoting classroom time to reading is an important aspect of literacy learning. Students in effective classrooms “did more guided reading, more independent reading, more social studies and science reading than students in less-effective classrooms” (Allington, 2002). “Explicitly setting expectations for students engaged in independent reading and follow-up to ensure that the expectations were met illustrates a dimension of task design that can increase the efficacy of silent reading” (Hiebert & Martin, 2009). When children read a lot throughout the day, they need a rich supply of books that they can read successfully, that is, where they read with a high level of accuracy, fluency and comprehension at their independent reading level (Hiebert, 2009). “It is the high accuracy, fluent, and easily comprehended reading that provides the opportunities to integrate complex skills and strategies into an automatic, independent reading process” (Allington, 2002). Allington and Cunnington (2002) recommend that classrooms have access to five hundred books or more. These books should be circulated among classrooms, using school library and book room resources, so that new choices are available to students on a regular basis.

**Substantive, challenging tasks that involve student choice.** Such tasks motivate and engage students and deepen student thinking. SWSTs reported that when students were given rich tasks that were relevant or connected to the students’ prior experience, they were more engaged and able to demonstrate their thinking and learning more successfully. Inquiry teams in Kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms indicated that student choice of activities increases engagement in learning, quality of work, and the quantity and quality of peer interactions.

**Finding ways to motivate students to engage in literacy activities.** The following strategies have been documented by Pressley (2006, p. 399) as being effective in engaging students. Those with an asterisk were also reported as important by SWSTs. Effective teachers:

- scaffold learning*
- encourage autonomy and give choices*
- connect with students personally*
- support appropriate risk taking

“Task predicts performance.” Since the work that students are being asked to do exactly predicts the performance we get on external measures our plans should address the calibre of tasks students are being given in order to improve the quality and reduce the variability from class to class.

Elmore, 2009
encourage students to be curious

ensure that students know the learning goals and understand the tasks they are given*

provide feedback*

consistently model interest and enthusiasm

make home–school connections

conduct opportunistic mini-lessons

provide challenging, but not overwhelming, content and tasks

favour depth over breadth

ensure the classroom is rich in good literature

provide concrete examples when covering abstract concepts

model thinking and problem-solving

send the message that school work is important and deserves intense attention

express confidence that students are equal to high academic demands

The following sections of this discussion paper outline the elements of an effective reading program based on each of the components of the four resources model. Effective teachers have a sophisticated understanding of each of these elements and understand the crucial role of assessment for learning in strategically selecting the next steps for each learner. All of the elements described below are important, tend to develop congruently, and serve to reinforce each other. If it is necessary to teach these elements to some learners in isolation, it must be immediately apparent how the elements fit into and support reading comprehension.

2.3.3 Code User

Code users decode print to identify words and sentences. The development of phonological awareness (which includes phonemic awareness; see Appendix 4.4) underpins the development of the ability to encode and decode print, which in turn is essential for literacy development. Many students require explicit instruction to acquire these skills. There is ample evidence that phonological awareness training is beneficial for beginning readers starting as early as age four (for example, see Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991). Approaches to teaching phonological awareness that have been documented as being effective generally include activities that are age appropriate and highly engaging. For example, effective instruction for four-year-olds involves rhyming activities, whereas Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1 instruction includes blending and segmenting of words into onset and rime, ultimately advancing to blending, segmenting, and deleting phonemes. As students participate in the daily activities of Kindergarten, their knowledge of phonological awareness can be observed and assessed and programming decisions can be made.
Systematic phonics instruction and the application of phonics knowledge during reading of connected text are vital in helping students develop a rich repertoire of word recognition strategies (Taylor, Pearson, Clark & Walpole, 2000). This instruction should be personalized for students who require this instruction. Giving students daily opportunities to write is one of the best ways to support them in learning about letter–sound relationships.

Emergent readers and writers need to acquire the following concepts about print:
- Print contains a message.
- Text is written and read from left to right with a return sweep to the left for the next line.
- There is a one-to-one match between each spoken and written word.
- Sentences start with capital letters and end with full stops.
- Print on the left-hand page is read before print on the right-hand page.
- The print on the book's cover and title page gives the title and other details, and the cover picture generally suggests what the book is about.
- Illustrations convey meaning and relate to the text on the page.

2.3.4 Meaning Maker
Meaning makers read to understand. They integrate knowledge from the illustrations; visual features such as graphs, labels, or headings; their own background knowledge; and so on. They think beyond what is explicitly stated in the text to what is implied. They look for clues provided by the author or illustrator that lead to understanding the text at a different level of comprehension.

In schools that have an effective reading program, the following practices support meaning making.

Language and word study is integrated throughout the day and focuses on high-leverage, all-purpose words. Beck, McKeown & Kucan (2002) suggest the following criteria for identifying words to teach:
- Importance and utility—words that appear frequently across a variety of domains
- Instructional potential—words that can be worked with in a variety of ways so that students can build rich representations of them and of their connections to other words and concepts
- Words for which students understand the general concept but provide precision and specificity in describing the concept.

Research has found that increasing student vocabulary has a strong effect on reading ability. “Vocabulary knowledge has been identified as the most important indicator of oral language proficiency, which is particularly important for the comprehension of both spoken and written language” (White & Kim, 2009).
“High-quality lessons include many opportunities for student vocabulary development” (Pressley, 2006). Language and word study must be continuously and explicitly taught across all subject areas.

**Strategies to enhance comprehension are modelled and guided** in order to support independent use and application by students. Student use of these strategies is monitored by the students themselves and by the teacher. Some examples of reading strategies are as follows:

- Set a purpose for reading.
- Activate relevant background knowledge.
- Read texts aloud in order to provide opportunities for critical thinking and substantive conversations.
- Promote a robust vocabulary and discuss unknown words.
- Promote rereading for different purposes and to build fluency.
- Construct/compose and deconstruct texts using labels, graphic organizers, and so on.
- Interact with texts – retell, dramatize, question the text.
- Reinforce comprehension skills – activating prior knowledge, predicting, questioning, visualizing, monitoring, clarifying, drawing inferences, summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating.
- Respond to and reflect on texts.

### 2.3.5 Text User

Text users read with an understanding of purpose and audience. They need an understanding of genre in order to approach a text appropriately. More sophisticated text users expect, for example, to read fictional narratives for an understanding of character and plot development, and, most importantly, for enjoyment. They understand that factual texts focus on information and often contain specific text features to help the reader understand the ideas more clearly. It is for text users that the reciprocal nature of reading and writing are most clearly seen. As a reader, the learner interacts with words, grammatical structures, and other language patterns in order to construct meaning and understand the ideas in the text. As a writer, the learner starts with ideas and represents these in grammatical structures and other language patterns in an appropriate text form. Learners need to know that both reading and writing are purposeful and express meaning; they share the same functions and use the same print conventions and language features. Thus, writing is neither secondary to reading nor something to be taught separately from reading.
To support the development of students as text users, students should be exposed to texts of all types – menus, plays, brochures, flyers, surveys, graphs, narrative non-fiction, newspapers, letters, recipes, novels, picture books, memos, multimedia and electronic documents, and so on.

**Integrating literacy across the curriculum** allows students to engage in relevant learning, explore a variety of texts, and explore a rich cultural context through which they can connect their literacy learning to their lives. Research has shown that “literacy development thrives when it is integrated into content area instruction, and content mastery improves as students become better readers” (International Reading Association, 2007). “Instruction that situates conceptual understandings or knowledge as the ends of instruction and that positions reading, writing and discourse as tools to achieve these ends creates the kind of ‘need to know’ that can motivate engaged reading and propel literacy development ahead” (Hiebert, 2009).

### 2.3.6 Text Analyzer

Text analyzers evaluate texts to determine the author's purpose and the conscious decisions the author has made to include or exclude certain information. They consider the point of view that is evident in the text, as well as social and cultural fairness or bias. Text analyzers also consider how well the author achieved his or her purpose for writing and how the author might have written in a different way to be more effective.

Higher-order thinking, or critical thinking, among students needs to be encouraged through rich questions, prompts, and tasks. One way to scaffold inquiry and lead students to higher-order thinking is illustrated in the *arc of inquiry* (see Appendix 4.5). Opportunities should be provided for students to engage in a critical discussion of a wide variety of texts, including television programs, movies, web pages, advertising, music, gestures, oral texts, and other means of expression. Critical thinking is the process of thinking about ideas or situations in order to understand them fully, identify their implications, make a judgement, and/or guide decision making. Students use critical thinking skills when they assess, analyze, and/or evaluate the impact of something and when they form an opinion about something and support their opinion with a rationale. Critical literacy is the capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of a text to determine what is present and what is missing, in order to analyze and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent (The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program, Draft Version, 2010, pp. 45–46).

The classrooms with outstanding teachers were filled with the message that students can and will learn. These teachers were determined that their students would develop as readers and writers. Literacy instruction was exceptionally well balanced with respect to the elements of whole language – reading of outstanding literature, writing – and the explicit teaching of skills. Reading, writing and skills instruction were very well integrated in these classrooms. The skills lessons were filled with reminders about how the skills related to children’s reading and writing. Moreover, the children had many opportunities to use the skills as they read and wrote.

Pressley, 2006, p. 252

(For more information about pragmatic practices (text users) see the LNS monograph Critical Literacy: A Lens for Learning, August 2009 posted at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/)

For students to become critical thinkers, teachers must not only encourage such behaviour in the classroom but also model critical thinking themselves. Good educators engage in intentional teaching that is “planful [sic], thoughtful, and purposeful” and that uses “their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organize learning experiences.”

Epstein, 2008
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Based on its research, the Working Group is making the following suggestions for consideration by districts, schools, primary divisions, and grade teams.

1. Identify a key leader in each district, and establish regular contact among these leaders to monitor the implementation of effective reading strategies and to give input into implementation supports that may be required.

2. Support School Effectiveness Leads in sustaining the focus on primary reading and in monitoring reading achievement in the primary division.

3. Share the learning from studies related to primary reading, including the work of the Student Work Study Teachers and collaborative inquiries into reading instruction and pedagogy, through webcasts and publications.

4. Ensure that professional learning opportunities support teachers in Kindergarten and primary classrooms in their understanding of and ability to act upon observed reading behaviours among students.

5. Reinforce the message that taking and analyzing running records/records of reading behaviour is an ongoing assessment for learning practice.

6. Using the lens of this paper, review kindergarten to grade 3 local data and instructional practices related to reading. Ask questions and determine action steps based on the findings. For example:
   - How are we assessing oral language development?
   - How does assessment for learning inform instruction and meet the needs of individual learners?
   - How can we determine whether we are delivering instruction that responds to student needs?
   - How can we determine whether our students are reading proficiently enough to draw conclusions, interpret texts, and make evaluations?
   - Who are the partners that have a role in improving primary reading?
Do our interventions enhance the effectiveness of classroom practice?

How many high-quality books in good condition are available in our classrooms, book rooms, and school libraries?

In what ways are we engaging parents in and encouraging them to support Kindergarten and primary division students?

7. Provide opportunities for Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers to participate in networks to study effective reading instruction and pedagogy. Challenge beliefs and practices that are not supported by research and classroom evidence.

8. Ensure that reading behaviours and expected levels of achievement for students in Senior Kindergarten to Grade 3 are clearly understood.

9. Monitor reading achievement to support students in meeting content and performance standards and apply early intervention strategies as needed.

Successful Kindergarten to Grade 3 teams seek out exemplary practices in which reading is inextricably tied to writing, viewing, and representing and in which none of the necessary elements of reading, as enumerated in this discussion paper, stand on their own but are woven together in ways that meet individual student needs. Teams then decide how to engage the other teachers in their divisions or network to spread the learning.
4.1 Evolving View: Four Families of Practice

Evolving View: Four Families of Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Maker</th>
<th>Code User</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses prior knowledge and personal and/or world experiences to construct and communicate meaning when reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing. The literate learner is a “text participant,” forming and communicating his/her own interpretation in light of his/her own knowledge and point of view.</td>
<td>Recognizes and uses the features and structures of written, visual and multi-modal texts, including the alphabet, sounds in words, phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, conventions, sentence structure, text organization, and graphics, as well as other visual and non-visual cues to break the “code” of texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text User</th>
<th>Text Analyzer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands that purpose and audience help to determine the way text is constructed: form, format, medium, structure, tone, the degree of formality, and sequence of components. The literate learner uses this knowledge and a variety of thinking processes to read, listen and view, as well as to write, speak and represent ideas.</td>
<td>Understands that texts are not neutral; that they represent particular views, beliefs, values and perspectives to serve different interests; that other views and perspectives may be missing; that the design and messages of texts can be interpreted, critiqued, challenged and alternatives considered. The literate learner decides what to think now, considers possibilities and when to take action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 4.2 Comparison of Good and Poor Readers in Grade 2

Comparison of Good and Poor Readers in Grade Two

Catts, Fey, Zhang, and Tomblin (1999) examined the effects of phonological processing and oral language abilities on reading levels and reading disabilities in young children. Two approaches were taken in the study. In the first approach, 604 participants with a mean age of 7.9 years were divided into good and poor readers on the basis of reading performance in Grade 2. The two reading groups were then compared in terms of the level of phonological processing and other language abilities they had displayed in Kindergarten.

In the second approach, multiple regression was employed to investigate the relative contributions of phonological processing and oral language abilities in predicting Grade 2 reading achievement across reading groups. Results indicated that over 70 percent of poor readers had a history of language deficits in Kindergarten. Most of these children had problems with both phonological processing and oral language. Regression analyses further indicated that oral language and phonological processing abilities each accounted for unique variance in reading achievement.

Kim Mitton SLP YRDSB
Longitudinal Investigation by Catts, Fey, Zhang, & Tomblin (1999)
Appendix 4.3 **Metacognitive Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metacognitive strategy</th>
<th>What does the student do?</th>
<th>What does the teacher do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize and plan</td>
<td>Plan how to accomplish the task:                                                                                     • List steps for how they will solve a problem.                                                                                                      • Help students develop an appreciation for what learning tasks might demand, as well as an awareness of the particular knowledge and strategies the students can bring to these tasks.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify the data they are lacking.                                                                                                                    • Ensure students are clear on learning goals and how they will be evaluated.                                                                                           • Teach and model goal setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describe plans for finding or producing the missing data.                                                                                           • Co-construct success criteria with students.                                                                                                                                    • Provide exemplars to support student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select the most appropriate strategies and sequence them so they will be used at the appropriate time.                                                                                                         • Ask: What can you do to get started? What is your plan of action? What criteria are you using to make your choices?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage personal learning</td>
<td>• Determine how he or she learns best.                                                                                                                             • Provide opportunities for students to learn about their personal interests and strengths.                                                                                   • Support learning with constructive, descriptive feedback.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Arrange conditions that help him or her to learn.                                                                                                             • Use interviews, conferences, and learning conversations to support students’ achievement of the learning goals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Seek opportunities for practice.                                                                                                                                  • Use anchor charts or criteria charts, rubrics, and/or exemplars to give students a sense of what quality work looks like.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus attention on the task.                                                                                                                                      • Give feedback at critical checkpoints to enable students to monitor their learning.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>While working on a task:                                                                                                                                        • Engage in learning conversations and peer assessments to explain and question his or her own thinking.                                                                                           • Use exemplars to support students in developing their self-assessment skills.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Check progress on the task.                                                                                                                                                                             • Help students learn how to ask self-monitoring questions as they are learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Check comprehension.                                                                                                                                                                                                  • Teach students how to become intentional learners by helping them manage uncertainty, redirect their efforts productively, and persevere when they are frustrated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Redirect the normal frustration that occurs when concepts are confusing or do not immediately lead into further learning.                                                                                           • Ask: While you were reading, what was going on inside your head to monitor your understanding of the story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive strategy</td>
<td>What does the student do?</td>
<td>What does the teacher do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>After completing a task:</td>
<td>• Teach and model self-assessment skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assess how well he or she completed the task.</td>
<td>• Encourage a reflective stance towards learning that helps students assess and direct their own emerging understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assess how well he or she applied the chosen strategies.</td>
<td>• Encourage students to recognize other contexts in which a particular strategy can be used (i.e., transfer and generalization of learning).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decide how effective the strategies were in helping to accomplish the task.</td>
<td>• Ask: When you are communicating with others, what indicators are you aware of in yourself and others that signal you are being understood? As you talked to yourself about this problem, what new insights were generated?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use the results of self-evaluation to set new learning goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use proper cognitive terminology to describe mental processes. For example, “I have a theory that..., I’m conducting an experiment..., my strategy was...”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Appendix 4.4 Phonological Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonological awareness includes identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes – as well as phonemes. It also encompasses awareness of other aspects of sound, such as rhyming, alliteration, and intonation.

Pressley writes, “My hunch is that the reason teachers do not concern themselves with developing phonemic awareness is because they do not know how to develop it in children. This surmise is based, in part, on the many questions I receive from the teachers about what phonemic awareness is and how it can be developed in children. There is also a growing data base that teachers lack understanding of phonemic awareness as well as knowledge of how to promote many other beginning reading competencies, with some teachers not aware at all that they are deficient in understanding what should be taught and how to teach it” (Pressley, 2006, p. 118).
Appendix 4.5 Arc of Inquiry

The arc of inquiry. The trajectory takes students from factual comprehension, to applicative literacy. This kind of teaching makes what we do matter – to ourselves, our students, and our world.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey. (2007) Engaging Readers and Writers With Inquiry New York, NY: Scholastic p. 113


White, Clarie E., & Kim, James S. (2009). *Putting the pieces of the puzzle together: How systematic vocabulary instruction and expanded learning time can address the literacy gap*. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/05/elt_language_development.html

