

# 10

**REASONS  
WHY  
TEACHING  
LITERACY**

**IS LIKE  
LEARNING  
TO RIDE  
A BIKE**



  
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# Teaching students to read should be easy, right?

Once you know how to read, it feels so natural that it is easy to take for granted as an innate skill we all possess—kind of like riding a bicycle and forgetting you had to learn how. Yet, we continue to see a growing crisis of illiteracy across our education system, with students at every grade level falling behind in reading test scores.

**Just as there are many skills needed to ride a bicycle, there are a number of essential skills involved in reading.**

Like knowing how to ride a bicycle before you can teach another, effective teachers of reading should know and understand HOW students learn to read and write, recognize the reasons WHY some students struggle, and be able to determine WHAT to teach to increase student success.



**Here are 10 reasons why teaching literacy is like learning to ride a bicycle** and how *LETRS* professional learning can help raise reading achievement.

1. Balance, balance, balance.
2. A bicycle isn't going to ride itself.
3. It helps to have someone cheering for you.
4. Roadblocks can be overcome.
5. You need a solid foundation beneath your wheels.
6. If you fall off, get back on.
7. Sometimes, you cannot clearly see the road.
8. Bicycling builds muscles, but it takes patience and practice.
9. With the necessary skills, you can ride fast and do wheelies.
10. Mastery helps you enjoy the ride.



# 1

## Balance, balance, balance.

Without training on the essential components of reading, educators are unable to effectively teach literacy. Many higher education teacher preparation courses teach only some of the components recommended by major consensus reports like the National Reading Panel (National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The majority of teacher preparation programs do not offer courses that thoroughly prepare teachers to build all of the essential skills involved in reading (Brady et al., 2009; Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013; Joshi, Binks, Hougen, Dahlgren, Dean, & Smith, 2009; Joshi, Binks, Graham, Dean, Smith, & Boulware-Gooden, 2009; Walsh, Glaser, & Dunne-Wilcox, 2006).

**LETRS® (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling)** helps teachers understand the importance of as well as how to teach all five of the essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) plus oral language, spelling, and writing.



2

## A bicycle isn't going to ride itself.

Even with the best curriculum available, if teachers are unsure of what to do with it, it will sit unused on the shelf. Successful use of a program depends on how well a teacher understands the content and purpose of its various components and instructional routines. Mandating use of a good curriculum does not guarantee a strong implementation (Haager, Heimbichner, Dhar, Mouton, & McMillan, 2008; Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). General and special education teachers will be more inclined to teach foundational reading and writing skills, along with comprehension, if they are well prepared in the content and methodology of code-based, explicit instruction (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004).

**LETRS** provides educators with the background, depth of knowledge, and tools to teach language and literacy skills to every student through embedded, online teacher modeling that illustrates each step of instruction. Bridge-to-practice activities provide guidance about how to connect learning to classroom practice. **LETRS** teaches educators the **WHAT, WHY** and **HOW** of literacy instruction.

## 3

## It helps to have someone cheering for you.

Teachers need compatible coaching and peer support. Even if they understand and want to apply the type of instruction supported by scientific research, they are more likely to do so if they work in a supportive, collaborative context. Grade-level teammates, coaches and mentors, and school administrators must share goals and create a mutually supportive environment for powerful, informed instruction to be the norm in a school. Compatible coaching, in which the coach and teacher share the same goals and the same knowledge base, makes a significant difference in teachers' success with students (Carlisle, & Berebitsky, 2011).

With **LETRS**, shared learning opportunities provide a venue for authentic collaboration, build camaraderie, and create a sense of shared purpose in achieving success with a district's literacy initiative.

# 4

## Roadblocks can be overcome.

Learning to read is neither easy nor natural for the majority of students—they do not just pick it up through exposure to good books (Adlof & Perfetti, 2014; Olson, Keenan, Byrne, & Samuelsson, 2014; Seidenberg, 2013, 2017). Teaching reading to a student who does not learn easily or naturally is a complex and challenging professional enterprise that requires deep knowledge of content, of the cognitive and language factors that shape student learning, and of pedagogical detail (Brady, 2011; Moats, 1999).

**LETRS** addresses the structures of English, the cognitive processes of learning to read, and the teaching practices proven to be effective in preventing and remediating reading difficulties, including dyslexia.

# 5

## You need a solid foundation beneath your wheels.

Most teachers have not had courses in language structure or language development even though learning to read and write entirely depend on, and are intertwined with, language competence at many levels. Teachers of reading must be teachers of language. For example, there are many factual details that explain how English spelling represents sounds, syllables, and meaning that teachers must know to help students remember words (Moats, 1995, 2010; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011). These details include similarities and contrasts among the speech sounds, and how letters and their combinations are used to represent sounds, syllables, and meaningful parts of words. Likewise, there are many aspects of academic language in text that teachers should be teaching explicitly, such as how syntax and meaning are related and how text is organized (Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro, 2015).

**LETRS** fills these gaps and enhances teachers' understanding of the complexities of language, setting the groundwork for effective reading instruction.



# 6

## If you fall off, get back on.

Concepts about language are elusive and challenging for many adults, even if we assume them to be simple on the surface because we expect young children to master them. In fact, many adults who become teachers of reading do not have fully developed phoneme awareness or an understanding of why words are spelled the way they are (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, & Chard, 2001; Moats, 1995; Fielding-Barnsley, 2010; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, & Lee, 2008). For example, in a recent study by Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, and Lee (2008), the authors found that “the phonemic skill level of the reading and special education teachers was not sufficient to provide accurate phonemic awareness intervention. ...Many teachers had specific misconceptions about speech and print (p. 517).”

**LETRS** treats phoneme awareness and phonics, two areas where most teachers need more training, with clarity, depth, and practical guidance, helping teachers value and understand the impact of these basic foundational skills as a bridge to more complex literacy skills.

# 7

## Sometimes, you cannot clearly see the road.

Before substantive professional development occurs, teachers typically have misconceptions about their own knowledge base for teaching reading. Those who know more about reading tend to underestimate their knowledge and those who know less tend to overestimate their knowledge. Therefore, teachers may not be the best judges of what they need to learn (Brady et al., 2009; Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004).

**LETRS** provides teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and the means for measuring their own knowledge gain, helping them recognize their gaps in knowledge and increasing personal accountability for their district’s reading program success.



# 8

## Bicycling builds muscles, but it takes patience and practice.

To learn about the essential components of reading instruction and how to implement them, several years may be required (Moats & Foorman, 2003, 2008; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Extended time is necessary for working teachers who must adjust and change existing practices while striving to absorb new information about an area for which they may have limited disciplinary knowledge. More practice is necessary for teachers to learn concepts than is typically provided in short-term courses or workshops (Spear-Swerling, 2009; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2003, 2004). As Cunningham et al. (2009) argue, teachers learn at different rates and often begin their coursework or professional development with inaccurate ideas about how much, and what, they should learn to be effective in the classroom. Many teachers need direct feedback about the differences between their actual knowledge and what they believe they know.

**LETRS** is designed to take about two years, but its high degree of flexibility in implementation models allows for targeted learning around specific topics. Self-paced, online coursework provides anytime access to high-quality learning experiences, which is delivered in intuitive, digestible chunks, making it ideal for PLC settings.

# 9

## With the necessary skills, you can ride fast and do wheelies.

We know that substantive professional development has been shown to have powerful beneficial effects on student learning.

When general education and intervention teachers learn and apply the information contained in **LETRS** with a supportive context in place, overall achievement levels increase and fewer children experience reading difficulties (Carlisle, Correnti, Phelps, & Zeng, 2009; Foorman, Schatschneider, Eakin, Fletcher, Moats, & Francis, 2006; McCutchen et al., 2002; McCutchen, Green, Abbott, & Sanders, 2009; Moats & Foorman, 2008).





# 10

## Mastery helps you enjoy the ride.

Effective teachers are more content and enjoy their jobs. This factor is less often measured and documented, but in our four-year project with low-performing, high-poverty schools in Washington DC and Houston, TX, teachers who learned how to teach effectively brought their students from below basic up to the national average in reading (Moats & Foorman, 2008).

Along with these improvements came consistently enthusiastic feedback from teachers who participated in courses like **LETRS** during the four years. Teacher absenteeism diminished; interest in professional learning accelerated; pride and empowerment replaced burnout and low expectations. We have witnessed these changes in many settings across the country.



**LETRS**, by Dr. Louisa Moats, is a proven professional learning course of study designed to help all educators who teach reading master the content and principles of effective language and literacy instruction. With content and teaching recommendations based on decades of scientific reading research, *LETRS* accelerates teacher knowledge, which directly benefits students.



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Teachers matter more to student achievement than any other factor. A skilled instructor can change the lives of students.

**LETRS** is the first step toward a critical change in practice that can alter the course of students' futures. It is a change in the way teachers teach reading, a change in the effectiveness of instruction, and a change to the trajectory of literacy for all. If you have teachers who missed the training wheels stage of literacy instruction and are wobbling through reading programs, **LETRS** will give them the necessary tools to confidently propel themselves and their students along the literacy journey.

***“The LETRS training effectively connected current research to explicit instruction and gave all participants meaningful content and strategies to implement in classrooms immediately. ... The LETRS modules rank among the most extensive and in-depth training I have ever received in reading.”***

**—Pamela Herrera, Supervisor of Title I, Delaware**

***“LETRS is a well-developed, step-by-step program that takes teachers through knowledge of reading, scope, and sequence with the best strategies and the best research to support it. ... LETRS has empowered our teachers to do their best for kids.”***

**—Linda Flint, Reading Coordinator, Kansas**

***“Thank you for providing the most valuable training I’ve received in my entire educational career. I now have the knowledge, backed by research, to support my teachers as they create reading success for all students.”***

**—Gary Robinson, Principal, Indiana**



Learn how and why it works at [voyagersopris.com/LETRS](https://voyagersopris.com/LETRS)