

---

**The Winston Churchill  
Memorial Trust**

**Churchill Fellowship 2008**



The Northern Districts Education Centre  
(Sydney) Churchill Fellowship to investigate a  
schoolwide approach to effective reading  
instruction in the USA

**Ian Thompson**

---

**Name:** Ian Thompson  
20 Brucedale Ave NSW 2121  
Phone (h): 02 9869 3269

**Position:** Principal, Beresford Road Public School  
Phone: 02 9896 2644

**Project Description:** To investigate a schoolwide approach to effective reading instruction in the USA

I understand that the Churchill Trust may publish this report, either in hard copy or on the internet or both, and consent to such publication.

I indemnify the Churchill Trust against any loss, costs or damages it may suffer arising out of any claim or proceedings made against the Trust in respect of or arising out of the publication of any report submitted to the Trust and which the Trust places on a website for access over the internet.

I also warrant that my final report is original and does not infringe the copyright of any person or contain anything which is, or the incorporation of which into the final report is, actionable for defamation, a breach of any privacy law or obligation, breach of confidence, contempt of court, passing-off or contravention of any other private right or of any law.

Ian Thompson

Date

# **INDEX**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **3. FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

## **4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

## **5. TEACHING READING IN A SCHOOLWIDE MODEL**

- **The Three Tier Model**
- **Factors affecting implementation**
- **Common support structures**
- **The common wisdom regarding implementation**

## **6. TEACHING RESOURCES**

## **7. EVIDENCE ON EFFECTIVENESS**

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- **Possible contentious issues**

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **10. FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

# **Churchill Fellowship Report 2008 (Northern Districts Education Centre)**

## **Investigating a schoolwide approach to effective reading instruction in the USA**

This report outlines key findings from my Churchill Fellowship visit to Oregon, Texas and Hawaii to investigate schoolwide reading models

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

I wish to publicly thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust who has given me this unparalleled opportunity to further my knowledge and experience.

I am also most grateful to the Northern Districts Education Centre who had the foresight to donate funds to the Trust to allow myself and others to improve educational practice for future generations.

My employer, the NSW Department of Education and Training, holds Churchill Fellowships in high regard and has enthusiastically backed my study tour with paid leave and professional support.

My family has given me unwavering support to enable me to pursue my study tour with confidence and enthusiasm. I am deeply indebted to them.

I hope to repay the trust and support of all of the above by making a significant contribution to the education of thousands of Australian students in the area of reading. I have conducted my whole tour with the notion of translating everything I have learned into an Australian context in a way that will best benefit Australian students.

As a most fortunate recipient of a Fellowship, I have freely promoted the Churchill Trust in the USA and have often seen rather envious professionals there who lament the lack of a similar opportunity.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Author:** Ian Thompson, 20 Brucedale Avenue, Epping, NSW AUSTRALIA 2121

**Position:** Principal, Beresford Road Public School, Greystanes, NSW

**Contact:** [Ian.Thompson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Ian.Thompson@det.nsw.edu.au) Ph: 02 9896 2644(w), 02 9869 3269(h)

The Fellowship was undertaken between 31 August and 5 October 2008 and involved travel to Oregon, Texas and Hawaii. The purpose of the Fellowship was to study the implementation of a schoolwide model of reading instruction in the USA.

I visited locations where this model had been successfully operating for some years and had established support structures. The University of Oregon and the University of Texas have led the development of this model in the US and have supported schools with training and resource advice. Implementing schools in all three states are achieving positive results.

I conducted 18 interviews, visited 10 schools, participated in 3 training courses and presented at one conference. This broad range of experiences allowed me to understand the variations of implementation within the model and draw relevant conclusions for Australian schools. I am convinced that this is a highly effective model of reading instruction which can impact on reading outcomes in Australia.

### Highlights

- Interviewing many of the academic staff at the Centre for Teaching and Learning in Eugene, including Professor Ed Kame'enui, Director of the Centre.
- Interviewing Dr Roland Good, founder and developer of the DIBELS database.
- Visiting Toledo Elementary School, Oregon
- Attending the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies Training in Austin
- Interviewing Dr Sharon Vaughn, Director of The Meadows Centre
- Visiting Mary Jane Sims, and UT Elementary Schools, Austin
- Presenting at the 2008 Leadership Symposium in Honolulu

### Recommendations

- Initially, schools with a higher than average proportion of students failing to read, should adopt the model. It should be adopted as a whole, not partially.
- Schools should use high quality, research-based commercial core and supplemental programs similar to those used in the US.
- Schools should utilise the DIBELS database at the University of Oregon, to assess and record student progress.
- School systems adopting the model use a structure as described in the section 'Common Support Structures' in this report.
- That quality professional development should be built in to the implementation process with the goal of schools largely self-sustaining the model.

### Implementation and Dissemination

- The pilot project initiated in five Western Sydney schools in 2008 will continue, and expand when possible, incorporating my recommendations.
- I am meeting with the Federal Assistant Treasurer, The Honourable Chris Bowen to discuss the possibility of Federal Government funding for the project.
- I will disseminate my findings to Principals in Western Sydney, and to a wider audience through the Australian Association of Special Education.
- I have arranged for several commercial US reading programs to be purchased and trialled in the pilot schools.

### **3. FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME**

**Eugene, Oregon** - 1 to 10 September 2008

#### **Interviews**

**Prof Ed Kame'enui, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)  
University of Oregon (U of O)**

**Dr Stan Paine, Director of Professional Development CTL, U of O**

**Prof Michael Bullis, Dean and Summerville-Knight Professor, College of  
Education, U of O.**

**Dr Kathy Howe, Director EBISS Project (Effective Behavioural and Instructional  
System Support) U of O (formerly Director of Reading First Oregon)**

**Dr Carrie Beck, Director CTL Reading Clinic (Oregon Reading First), U of O**

**Dr Scott Baker, Associate Director CTL, U of O**

**Dr Doris Baker, Senior Researcher CTL, U of O**

**Dr Roland Good, Vice President, Dynamic Measurement Group. Creator and  
developer of DIBELS database.**

**Dr David Howe, Senior Researcher, CTL**

**Dr Trish Travers, Coordinator Oregon Reading First**

**Rhonda Wolter, District Reading Coordinator, Bethel District, Eugene**

#### **School Visits**

**Prairie Mountain Elementary School, Bethel District, Eugene**

**Toledo Elementary School, Toledo, Oregon (160kms from Eugene)**

#### **Training Attended**

**Whole day – 10 September 2008**

**Presenter: Jennifer Ashlock (Ashlock Consulting, California)**

**At Lane County Education Support District – Eugene**

**'How to use program maps and templates with core reading programs.'**

## **Austin, Texas – 11 to 21 September 2008**

### **Interviews**

**Dr Sharon Vaughn, Executive Director, The Meadows Centre for Preventing Educational Risk (Incorp. the Vaughn-Gross Centre), University of Texas (UT)**

**Dr Jade Wexler, Project Director, The Meadows Centre, UT**

**Dr Pam Bell-Morris, Project Director, The Meadows Centre, UT**

**Dr Silvia Linan-Thompson, Project Director, The Meadows Centre, former Director Vaughn Gross Centre UT**

**Dr Brian Bryant, Program Director, Mathematics Project, UT**

### **School Visits**

**Campbell Elementary School, Austin**

**Mary Jane Sims Elementary School, Austin**

**Texas School for the Deaf, Austin**

**University of Texas Elementary School, Austin**

### **Training Attended**

**Whole day training on 15 September 2008.**

**Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies Training**

**Host: Deborah Reed – Project Manager, Effective Instruction for Middle School Students with Reading Difficulties, Uni of Texas.**

## **Honolulu, Hawaii – 22 Sept to 3 Oct 2008**

### **Interviews**

**Dr Gloria Kishi, Education Specialist – Language Arts Coordinator Pihana Na Mamo (Native Hawaiian) Project, Hawaiian Department of Education.**

**Michael Fahey, P-3 Professional Development Coordinator, Good Beginnings Alliance, Honolulu**

### **School Visits**

**Ala Wai Elementary School, Oahu**

**Kama'ili Elementary School, Oahu**

Ma'ili Elementary School, Oahu

Haleiwa Elementary School, Oahu

## Training Sessions

Training of School Reading Coordinators – Honolulu 23.9.08  
Host: Hawaiian Department of Education

## Conference

October 3 - Attended the 2008 Annual Leadership Symposium at the Honolulu Convention Centre.

I was invited to give a 'Feature Presentation' at this conference and gave a session entitled '*A Snapshot of Elementary Schooling in Sydney Australia*'.

### SUMMARY

Interviews	18
School Visits	10
Training Sessions	3
Conferences	1
Conference Presentations	1

## 4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the late 1990's the US Congress initiated the formation of the National Reading Panel. The role of the Panel was to conduct 'an evidence-based assessment of scientific research literature on reading' and to report on its implications for reading instruction. Prior to this time there had been fierce debate amongst educators about the best method to teach reading. The two 'camps' in this debate were generally known as the 'whole language' group and the 'phonics' group. There was also concern that US reading results were below expectations.

The Panel delivered their report in the year 2000. They found that there were five elements of early reading instruction that were supported by scientific evidence. These became known as the 'Five Big Ideas' in beginning reading. The five 'Big Ideas' are:

1. Phonemic Awareness (ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words)
2. Phonics (knowledge of letter-sound relationships)
3. Fluency (the ability to read at a good rate and with few errors)
4. Vocabulary (understand the meaning of individual words)
5. Comprehension (understand what is read)

A similar inquiry was initiated by the Australian Federal Government. The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy delivered its report in 2005 and made similar findings to the US report.

*"Findings from the research evidence indicate that all students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension."*  
(Executive Summary p1)

The US Federal Government's Reading First Program was initiated to implement the Reading Panel's recommendations. Specifically, it supported improved reading instruction in schools in low socio-economic areas with poor reading results. Schools receiving funding had to use research-based methods of instruction, regularly assess and monitor student progress.

*"This program focuses on putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. Through Reading First, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically based reading research, and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research, to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade."* (US D of E website)

The US Federal Government has funded the Reading First program with approximately 1 billion dollars per year from 2002-08.

The focus of this Fellowship was to study the schoolwide (or three tier approach) to reading instruction used by most schools funded under the US Reading First initiative. It should be noted that it is not compulsory for schools to use this approach. Most schools use it because it is based on research and it allows them to meet the government criteria. Most importantly, it is effective in teaching students to read.

## 5. TEACHING READING IN A SCHOOLWIDE MODEL

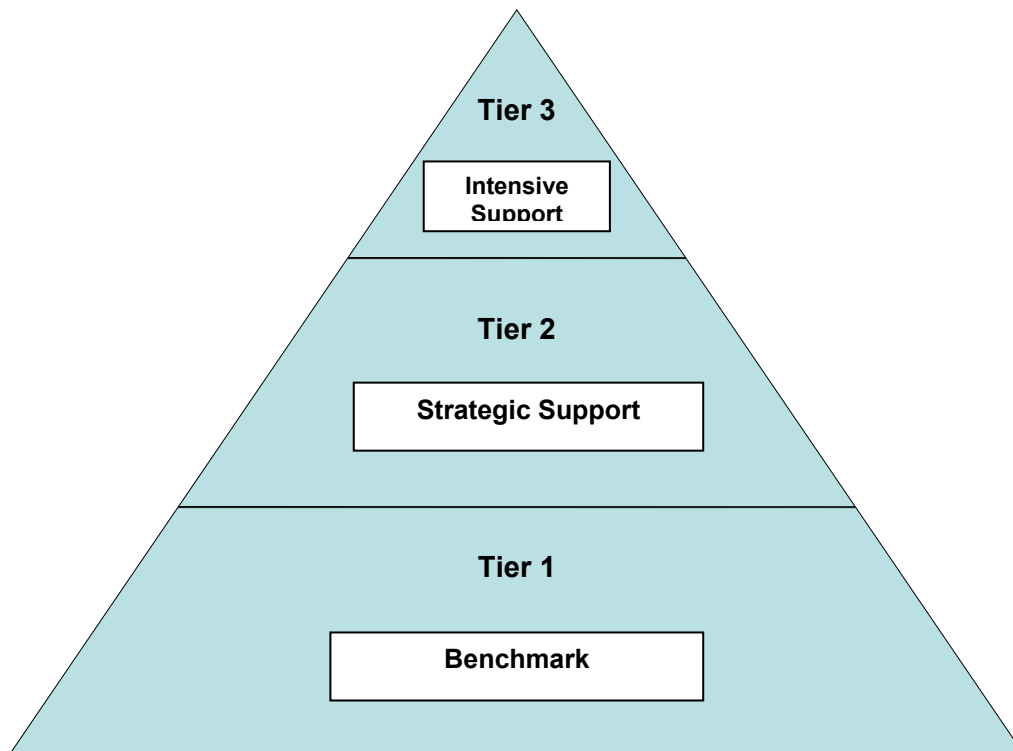
***“Ladybug, kiss your brain, that is much better”***

Teacher Sandra Cannon to a kindergarten student during a reading lesson  
Mary Jane Sims Elementary School, Austin, Texas

In this model of reading instruction, all students are assessed three times per year. Most schools used the DIBELS (dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills) assessments and entered results on the DIBELS database at the University of Oregon. Dr Roland Good, the developer of DIBELS stated that 4.3 million students are entered on the DIBELS database at the University of Oregon. This is approximately 25% of all elementary school students in the USA.

The database informs teachers where students are in relation to curriculum benchmarks. Their results place them in one of three tiers:

### The Three Tier (Schoolwide) Model



**Tier 1 – Benchmark (or primary intervention).** These students are on track in relation to the curriculum and have a high chance of maintaining successful learning. The students should continue in their current core program.

**Tier 2 - Strategic Support (or secondary intervention).** These students are a little behind in their learning in one or more areas and need targeted support to bring them back to benchmark. They may continue to participate in the core class reading lessons but need additional supplemental programs to address their weaknesses. If they do not receive additional instruction they have an increased risk of continuing failure. These students need more frequent monitoring to check their progress.

**Tier 3 - Intensive Support (or tertiary intervention).** These students are a long way behind in their learning and have a very high risk of continued failure. They need intensive teaching support and probably require a separate teaching program and more sophisticated teaching methods to address their learning needs. These students need frequent monitoring to check their progress.

The percentage of students within each tier varied. One school (Haleiwa Elementary School, Hawaii), reported that in 2001 they had only 16% of students at benchmark, but after adopting the three tier model, they had 55% at benchmark in 2007. The aim for all schools is to have at least 80% of students at benchmark.

The three tier model is a model of a process and not a prescription of exactly how to teach. It is also not a model mandated by any government. Schools have been free to choose whichever approach they believe suits them which meets the government criteria. All the schools visited have chosen the three tier model and then made their own local decision about the specific programs to use within the model.

It should be noted that in the USA schools routinely used a core, commercial reading program to teach reading. They also used commercial supplemental programs to address specific student learning needs. This was the major difference noted between US and Australian approaches to reading instruction. This issue will be explored further in the section on resources.

## **Factors Affecting Implementation**

All schools visited were implementing this three tier model; however they varied in how they implemented it. The factors which dictated exactly how schools implemented were:

- **The overall level of reading achievement in the school**

Schools with (initially) lower levels of achievement used core programs that incorporated more prescriptive and direct teaching methods.

- **The level of funding/staffing available to teach the programs**

Schools with higher funding/staffing levels were able to differentiate their teaching more. They could form smaller groups and provide a wider range of teaching methods and resources than could schools with lower staffing levels. Schools with more staff were generally those who received more funding because of poor results and the low socio economic status of their school community i.e. their need was greater.

- **The number of years the program was in operation**

Schools who had been successfully implementing for some time often fine tuned their procedures and programs. Schools that had initially chosen a more prescriptive program sometimes changed to a less prescriptive one when results improved.

- **The support staff available to support implementation**

The reading coordinator in each school was a key player in the quality of the programs implemented. The training and support schools received from universities and the district or state was also a factor. Teacher mobility had the potential to affect implementation, although most schools seemed to have procedures in place to deal with that.



**Independent work time at Campbell Elementary School, Austin**

## **Common Support Structures**

Structures to support the implementation of the Effective Schoolwide Reading model varied in the three states visited. They shared some common features:

### **Technical and Administrative Support**

Collaboration existed between a university (usually called technical support) and senior educational administrators at the state level. Their role was one of coordination, monitoring, overall data collection, funding, expert advice and evaluation.

### **Support to Schools**

Schools within a defined area (e.g. district, region) were supported by non school-based staff. In the US they were called Reading First Coordinators. They coordinated training, provided expert advice and provided a link between school practice and educational research.

### **School Coordinator**

A person within each school coordinated implementation, assessment, data collection, monitoring and training. This person often did not directly teach in the core

program but would usually teach a supplemental program. Schools with additional funding in the US had a designated class-free teacher doing this. This person should be able to demonstrate best practice to other teachers.

### **School Teams**

This could include a team to support the school coordinator. It includes grade teams that discuss data, student progress, and implementation.

### **Educational Leadership**

The principal in each school took a leading role in promoting exemplary educational practice. They were informed and involved in instructional issues in their school.

Some aspects of this structure are reliant on a degree of funding and systemic support for the approach, particularly the Support to Schools and School Coordinator features. In the US, these positions were funded from the Reading First budget. In Australia, either funding support or support through the re-allocation of existing staff would have to be arranged.

## **The Common Wisdom Regarding Implementation**

Principals, academics and coordinators gave similar advice about effective implementation.

**Teachers must 'buy in'** (the US phrase for commitment)

*"Teacher buy-in is the most important thing"*

Disa Hauge, Principal, Ma'ili Elementary School, Hawaii

Teacher commitment to the approach is vital. Staff should have the program fully explained, receive adequate training and be supported with implementation. Dr Carrie Beck Director CTL Reading Clinic (Oregon Reading First) strongly advised that when implementing, schools should 'focus on the data'. Teachers who may not initially be committed to the approach find it difficult to resist when results show that students in other teacher's classes are outperforming their class. Principal's reinforced this view after seeing many staff 'buy in' after witnessing improved results in other classes.

### **Differentiate Your Teaching**

*"Students have to get what they need with instruction"*

Sue McVeigh, Reading First Coach, Toledo Elementary School, Oregon

Schools need to do whatever they can to give each child the program they need. They do this by using a variety of proven programs, grouping (and re-grouping if necessary) according to assessment results. Students who are behind in reading need more time, better instruction and smaller groups. This is an essential component of this model.

### **Use Good Quality Commercial Programs**

*"With core programs, you know their effectiveness."*

Dr Stan Paine, Uni. of Oregon

Every school visited used commercial programs to teach reading. This enabled teachers to focus on delivering quality lessons, monitor student learning and give

feedback without needing to individually plan the scope and sequence of the curriculum. It results in consistency across and within grades and standardises the language and methodology of reading instruction. The good quality commercial programs are written by experts in curriculum design and sequencing. It would be virtually impossible for a classroom teacher to design a similar program in the time available.

### **Commit to Reading Instruction**

*“The school doubled the reading block for three months for Kindergarten students who were well behind – they caught up!”*  
Frieda Mills, Principal, Mary Jane Sims Elementary School, Austin

A school needs to commit to delivering a large block of uninterrupted reading instruction of at least 90 minutes per day. Students who struggle need extra instructional time and may be ‘pulled’ from other lessons in order to get the instruction needed to succeed.

### **Get Good Professional Development for Staff**

*“We need to train teachers to be intentional in their teaching”*  
Dr Ramona Trevino, CEO University of Texas Elementary School

Many schools, districts and states engaged trainers from other parts of the US to train staff, especially in the initial stages of adoption. In Hawaii in particular, there was no ‘technical support’ available from the University of Hawaii so the Department of Education, and even individual schools, engaged staff from the University of Oregon and other mainland universities to travel to Hawaii to train staff.



**A supplementary reading lesson at Ala Wai Elementary School, Honolulu**

## 6. TEACHING RESOURCES

The resources used were very different to those in use in Australian schools.

Federal and state governments in the US have made much of their funding to schools contingent upon them using research-based teaching methods. Schools receiving Reading First funding are an example.

All major publishers of reading programs have responded by publishing programs that meet government requirements. They are continuing to make revisions to ensure they continue to meet those requirements and the requirements of schools.

In California, the State Department of Education has approved the use of only two core reading programs - Open Court by McGraw Hill/SRA and Houghton-Mifflin Reading. The state authorities in both Hawaii and Oregon have done the same thing, although they have approved/recommended about six programs each.

Some districts in the US have mandated the use of one core program to bring consistency and assist training. Bethel District in Eugene only uses the Open Court program.

The most common core reading programs used and recommended are; Houghton Mifflin Reading, Open Court (SRA), Scott Foresman Reading Street and Reading Mastery Plus (used mainly with students with higher failure rates).

These were comprehensive, expensive programs, however, once purchased they could be used for 6-8 years. Publishers have increasingly catered for a wider range of students in newer editions. Most have extension, supplemental and English Learner components. Practitioners advised that some content could be cut and other areas needed to be supplemented to create a balanced program.

The most common supplemental programs used with students in Tier 2 are:

- Phonics for Reading - This is a catch up for students in Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 who are just a little bit behind.
- Read Naturally (Grades 1-8) - This is a reading fluency building program which is also available in a software package.
- Rewards (2000) - For Grades 4-6, it builds decoding of multi-syllable words, teaches/revises sounds and blends, teaches how to segment words then blend together to make sense.
- The Reading Mastery Plus core program (SRA) can also be used at this tier.
- The Corrective Reading program (SRA) was recommended for tier three students.

The major issues for Australian schools in regard to these resources are cost and availability. Only one core program and one supplemental program listed above are available in Australia at present. It may be possible to buy them from US publishers but the exchange rate and freight costs will add to the overall cost. It is also doubtful that any training support would come with any purchase because of the size of the Australian market and the distances involved.

## 7. EVIDENCE ON EFFECTIVENESS

Every school reported gains in student outcomes. Student problem behaviour was either minor or minimal when reading was meeting individual needs. In my visits to more than 50 classrooms over four weeks the level of attentiveness, focus and involvement of students during reading lessons was outstanding. *This was all the more impressive when one considers a large proportion of the students observed were from lower socio-economic backgrounds where poor reading results and some problem behaviour had been common.*

Some specific examples of outcomes achieved using this approach are:

**Campbell Elementary School, Austin** - using Scott Foresman core program.  
47% of Grade 1 students meeting state proficiency standard (state average 36%)  
42% of Grade 2 students meeting state proficiency standard (state average 32%)

**Texas School for the Deaf, Austin** – using Harcourt Trophies core program.  
In Kindergarten, between 0% and 8% of students met the state reading proficiency benchmark in phonological awareness and phonics. By the time students reached Grade 2 between 78% and 91% met the proficiency standard.

**Haleiwa Elementary School, Hawaii** – using Reading Mastery Plus as the core program. In 2001 14% met or exceeded the state benchmark. In 2007, after six years of implementation, 55% met the benchmark.

**Ma’ili Elementary School, Hawaii** – using Reading Mastery K-2 and Scott Foresman Grades 3-6. This was the lowest performing school in the state in 2003 with only 13% of students meeting or exceeding state benchmarks. In 2007 this had increased to 37%.

**Prairie Mountain Elementary School, Eugene** – using Open Court core program  
This was one of the original schools in the US to use the schoolwide approach to reading. The school’s results have improved so much that the school now does not qualify for Reading First funding.

**The Oregon State Department of Education** did a three year study on the effectiveness of the schoolwide approach in Oregon State. Fifty schools were included in the study. They found:

*“In each grade, and on every measure, mean performance scores have increased consistently each year.....In addition, across all measures, the percentage of children reaching benchmark or grade level goals has increased each year, and the percentage of children remaining at a high level of reading risk has decreased.....Effect sizes are consistently moderate to large in magnitude. This pattern suggests that Oregon Reading First is having a moderate to large impact on the reading skills of students in K-3.”*

(Executive summary p. 4)

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

*The three tier schoolwide model of reading instruction has proven effective in improving reading results for many thousands of students in US schools. Although state and federal authorities have mandated the use of these methods, schools using them can now see they are effective and have embraced them. Some sections of the educational community in the US continue to remain opposed to the idea of governments dictating teaching methods and demanding accountability from schools.*

In different states of the US and within individual schools the model is implemented in different ways. The core elements of the approach are, however, consistent across settings and states. *Systematic, research-based teaching methods, curriculum-based assessment, differentiated teaching and close monitoring of student progress were present in every school visited and are essential to the model.*

*The use of high quality commercial reading programs is a crucial part of this approach.* US educators and academics were surprised that Australian educators did not often employ commercial core programs in their teaching. The question was often, “How do the teachers work out exactly what to teach?”, or “How do you know that everyone is teaching the essential components?” The use of these programs supports teachers in delivering improved outcomes and frees them of the burden of programming in this complex teaching area.

The schoolwide model of reading *enables schools to provide a seamless and consistent framework to teach reading*, ensuring all students cover all the essential skills required for reading competency. *It is particularly effective with the early identification and remediation of reading difficulties.* By focussing on Grades K-3 it provides a cost effective investment in reading education by reducing the need for later intervention which is less effective and more expensive.

When used in clusters of schools, or in a large number of schools within a school system, *it increases the likelihood that students who transfer schools will have continuity of reading instruction*, both in the curriculum content, the methods of instruction and the assessment information available.

*This model facilitates efficient teacher training and provides a common language for reading instruction.* Teachers share the same reference point for professional dialogue about instruction, assessment and teaching methods. Large groups of teachers can participate in professional development at the same time, with the same focus.

In the US, schools that had used the model for some years *had developed a culture of good reading and were able to sustain it through changes of principal and staff.* New staff members were quickly inducted into the school’s reading culture and became a part of it. Positive results were also sustained.

*The three tiered (or schoolwide) approach is being increasingly applied to a number of areas in education.* It is well established in both the US and parts of Australia in the area of school behaviour and discipline where it is known as Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). The University of Texas is implementing it in the area of mathematics. In Hawaii, and other US states, a three tier model is being implemented with pre-school children to prevent and remediate behaviour problems. There may be other applications of the model. *The adoption of this reading model by*

*schools will facilitate the adoption of the same model in other areas of education as the same principles apply.*

The use of a research-based approach to reading instruction, which includes frequent curriculum-based assessment and the maintenance of a data base (DIBELS) of student results *allows for far greater accountability in education*. Use of proven teaching methods is ensured and frequent measures of student achievement are taken to assist individual schools to be accountable for their students' performance. Data can be aggregated across a group of participating schools to gauge the overall effectiveness of the approach.

### **Possible Contentious Issues**

Two issues are likely to be contentious in any implementation attempt.

The adoption of a prescribed model of reading instruction which takes away much of the autonomy teachers had in teaching reading will be problematic to some. The best response to this apprehension is perhaps the following quote.

*"We now have a prescription for reading proficiency, we know how to work with children just like doctors know how to work with patients and mechanics know how to work with cars."*

Ms Frieda Mills, Principal, Mary Jane Sims Elementary School, Austin, Texas.

Would we rather use an approach that is not based on the best scientific evidence? No other profession would.

The resource issue may be a difficult one also. Core reading programs of the same quality as those used in the US are not available in Australia. Australian teachers are wary of using American reading resources because there are some spelling and pronunciation differences. In addition, the readers that are a part of the commercial programs will have some American cultural content. There will be some stories about baseball, Abraham Lincoln or suchlike. There is no way around this issue. Australia is a comparatively small market and it is unrealistic to think publishers of core programs will spend the large amount of money necessary to amend their programs to suit Australian schools. We will have to accept these differences, modify them when possible, and take the relatively small amount of 'bad' with the good. It may be possible to use good quality Australian developed resources (such as MULTILIT) as supplementary programs.

Dr Roland Good, developer of the DIBELS database, has indicated he is willing to modify the assessment material to make it more "Australian", provided the integrity of the assessments are maintained. This would mainly involve spelling changes which would result in a more culturally appropriate set of assessments for Australian schools.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Implementing schools should consider the following recommendations:

1. Initially, schools with a higher than average proportion of students failing to read, should consider adopting the model. As these schools implement the model, and achieve success, other higher performing schools may adopt the

- model. The limitations of training and resources will necessitate a graduated approach to the adoption of the model within any educational system.
2. Schools should adopt the whole model, and not some parts of it. There is no evidence that partial adoption of the model is effective in improving student outcomes.
  3. Schools should use high quality, research-based commercial core and supplemental programs similar to those used in the US. The range of programs used, especially as a core program, may need to be very limited due to availability and training issues. It may only be possible to implement one core program in the short to medium term.
  4. Utilise the DIBELS database at the University of Oregon, to assess and record student progress.
  5. Schools should (if necessary) seek additional funding/support to purchase resources and facilitate teacher training in the short to medium term. This could include the provision of school-based personnel to coordinate implementation and training. Unless additional funding over the long term can be guaranteed, it is not recommended that additional funds be used to employ staff to directly implement the program with students.
  6. School systems adopting the model use a structure as described in the section 'Common Support Structures' in this report. The focus of any support structure should be to build the capacity to support student learning in the school. This capacity should be built as close to the student as possible.
  7. That quality professional development is built in to the implementation process with the goal of schools largely self-sustaining the model. Technical advice and professional development must be provided by personnel thoroughly familiar with the model and the research base. Some of this support may not be initially available in Australia.

## 10. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The pilot project initiated in five Western Sydney schools in 2008, will continue. As coordinator of the project, I will incorporate, where possible, the above recommendations.

The assessment data for over 2000 students in the pilot schools has recently been entered on the DIBELS database at the University of Oregon. Data will continue to be taken and entered three times per year. Pilot schools now have information to more closely tailor their teaching to the learning needs of their students and over 100 teachers are participating in training to respond to the data. The collaboration on teacher training with Dr Sarah McDonagh of Charles Sturt University in Bathurst will continue.

I am continuing to collaborate with senior executives in the Department of Education and Training in Western Sydney Region, and have their support. We are in the process of collecting baseline data for all schools in the project so that we can compare pre and post intervention results from the schools.

A meeting has been arranged with the Federal Assistant Treasurer, The Honourable Chris Bowen for me to discuss the possibility of Federal Government funding for the pilot project. He will visit my school on 27 October.

The preliminary findings of my study tour were presented to principals and coordinators of participating schools on 16 October. I plan to present to groups of principals in Sydney West in the coming months.

I have communicated with the President of the NSW Chapter of the Australian Association of Special Education and have been invited to present my findings in their journal or newsletter. These publications will reach an audience of educators across every sector of the education community in NSW and would be a logical follow-up to a presentation on the model made at their 2007 National Conference.

I will seek to expand the number of schools implementing the model. This may take some time as issues surrounding resources and training support would need to be resolved. The provision of 'technical advice' from university personnel with expertise in the approach is a major hurdle. I am not aware at present of anyone other than Dr McDonagh who could provide such expert support. This needs further investigation.

The resource issue is also being addressed. I have arranged for several commercial US reading programs to be purchased and trialled. Houghton Mifflin has already dispatched a sample of their core reading program to me free of charge.

I remain confident that this approach will be used by many more schools but organising the sustainability of this expansion will take some time and may be difficult, however, to quote Sir Winston Churchill:

**“Difficulties mastered are opportunities won”**



**Kindergarten students reading together at Mary Jane Sims Elementary School, Austin**