



## Pathways to Reading “Response to Ed Reports Program Evaluation”

### Primary Focus of Pathways to Reading (PTR):

The primary focus of PTR instruction is the development of phonemic awareness (PA) to the advanced level and phonics knowledge as foundations for independent reading and spelling for all students. This is also the primary focus of the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s English Language Arts Standards; Reading; Foundational Skills. Pathways to Reading received the most frequent score of “Meets Expectations” by the EdReports review process for the indicators of PA and Phonics.

PA and Phonics, two components of the reading process identified by the National Reading Panel (1999 - 2000) we believe are the most significant components of foundational reading. A common weakness for students experiencing difficulties in learning to read including dyslexics are rooted in a phonological core deficit as defined in the definition of dyslexia (DSMV).

PTR instruction ensures the development of these two skills and their transference to the tasks of independent reading and spelling in order to focus learning on comprehension.

‘Partially meets expectations’ was the over-all score for the PTR program resulting from a partially limited evaluation of the PTR program.

If a complete, extensive evaluation of PTR, were conducted we are confident it would have resulted in significantly more “Meets Expectations” scores. The EdReports evaluation was limited to written manuals only and did not include many other aspects of the program.

### Examples of aspects of PTR not considered in the Evaluation:

The key element not included in the review process is the required **Five day professional development training** prior to implementing PTR. The Professional Development Training, if included in the evaluation would have addressed many points not awarded. Manuals are not sold or made available without participation in the five-day training. The 30-hour training covers all instructional strategies, large and small group functions, manual usage, with an emphasis on teacher knowledge and skill development related to all aspects of PA and Phonics. Teachers acquire the knowledge and skills to work with all students and any presenting reading disability (prevention and intervention).

The limitation of the review to only manuals excluded training written materials, handouts, 100 plus videos, manipulatives and PTR trainer guidance and instruction. One evaluator acknowledged that the program did address certain indicators but materials that would show this “can’t be used” in the evaluation.

If the review included knowledge from the professional training regarding differentiated small group instruction as taught in the PTR 6-day lesson cycles, specific issues such as oral segmentation through Segment and Write activities, the frequency with which students read words and read in context with teacher error assists, three levels of vowel practice and letter identification which gives teachers the option of teaching q and x in kindergarten, teaching capital letters based on assessment of need, instruction of high frequency words and the skills that underlie the learning of these words (i.e. decoding skills, orthographic mapping vs. memorization) we believe the overall scoring would be would have reflected many ‘meets expectations’ criteria.

### **New Research directly impacting Common Core Standards have components embedded in PTR but not considered in the Evaluation:**

Fluency is significantly more than timed drills to demonstrate speed but is based on development of Advanced Oral PA skills, independent decoding skills and orthographic mapping. PTR includes instruction and assessment with of these underlying skills.

Dyslexia defined as a neurobiological learning disability with reading difficulties that ‘typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language – a brain based function.

Brain Based (Neurobiological deficiencies) and ELL students: Learning and mastery of foundational reading components are not dependent on nor deficiency specific to I.Q., culture, race, socio-economic status. Yet the review insists that special attention needs to be given to ELA students. PA and Phonics are entirely brain based functions as described in the DSMV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5<sup>th</sup> Edition). PTR instruction for all students is driven by brain based scientific research.

### **Examples of aspects of disagreement with EdReports evaluation:**

**Example of review including additional components to the Common Core Foundational Skills Standards.** Handwriting, though a worthy component of any ELA program is not specific to the Common Core Foundational Skills standards. Handwriting programs are part of a core ELA program not part of a supplemental program such as PTR.

**Another example is the addition of a provision for ELL (English Language Learners) or DLL (Dual Language Learners).** While a worthy component to an ELA curriculum it is not specific to the CC Foundational Skills. PTR shared quotes from David Kilpatrick, [Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties](#) (2015) in which he summarizes research with ELL students and

states: “The skills needed for ELLS to be successful in reading are no different than the skills needed for students whose first language is English.” PTR’s differentiated instruction and pacing, along with teaching the articulation of English vowels and consonant sounds is well suited for ELL students. PTR is used by many ELL teachers. ELL students need help in language skills related to vocabulary. They learn to decode words that they do not have a meaning for. This is an emphasis of the ELL teacher. Classroom teachers when reading words and reading in context will spend more time discussing the meaning of words. This information was not accepted in the EdReports review process and PTR received a 0/4 score.

### **Some examples of not recognizing alternative ways of teaching content:**

One example involves ‘Print Concepts’ described in Kindergarten and First grades as understanding the organization and basic features of print (words left to right, top to bottom, etc.)

EdReports seemed to have a pre-determined instructional process in place for teaching ‘print concepts’ and doesn’t allow for these standards being met in other ways. The process expected by EdReports is limited to use of ‘Big Books’, and authentic print to model the concepts. PTR teaches these concepts as students encounter sentences and pages of print. One reviewer stated that PTR did not meet the print concept of ‘recognizing that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters’. This statement is most incorrect. Students very early on are taught to recognize the articulation of speech sounds, to segment spoken words into individual speech sounds and to represent those sounds with letters. This is done in two strategies called Segment and Write and Old Word/New Word.

Another example is the teaching of all 26 alphabet letters upper and lower case. PTR focuses on teaching lower case letters and teaches the upper case as needed based on student assessment. In addition, PTR chooses to teach the spellings of -q and -x in first grade where the concepts of -q is always with -u and the two letters represent the sounds of /k/ /w/ and that -x is one letter that represents two sounds /k/ and /s/. These are learned more easily in first grade. They are taught in the K-1 band, but this wasn’t accepted by the Evaluators. Teachers in PTR five-day training learn that if they prefer to teach the sounds of q and x in kindergarten they may do so. But these variances are not accepted in the review.

Another example involves ‘Decodable Texts’. The Criterion states that the program ‘includes work with decodables’. However, the Evaluators insisted that the “decodable texts” must be authored by the program and included in the price of the program. PTR has authored a set of very early decodable books for kindergarten and sentence strips for Kindergarten and First Grade.

However, because PTR uses a logical simple to complex phonics program as do good decodable books (i.e. progressing from short vowels, to long vowels, progressing from basic consonants to consonant digraphs; progressing from words with 3 sounds to words with 5 sounds and multisyllable words) PTR takes advantage of a wide range of decodable books. PTR created a ‘**Placement Guide**’ which lists the

continuum of PTR skills as they are taught and lists books from many sources that follow a similar continuum and place them in the Guide.

Schools who own sets of decodable books may find them in the Placement Guide. If not included PTR instructors align texts owned by the school/district to the PTR program. This is a tremendous cost savings to the school/district. This strategy also provides many resources of decodable books in which teachers and schools build a decodable book library where books range from fiction to non-fiction and fantasy.

Learning to use decodable texts, leveled books and application of skills in reading words and reading in context is taught in the 5 day professional development training. Lack of acceptance of the Placement Guide and use of decodable books reduced PTR's score by as many as 8-10 points.

### **Training and Experience of Evaluators:**

There are sufficient discrepancies in written statements and explanations given for points not awarded to raise concern about the training and knowledge of the evaluators regarding PA and Phonics.

Does training and experience of the evaluators include classroom experience teaching PA and Phonics, academic training in these two components, clinical or tutoring experience working with students to understand basic and advanced skills of PA, how to assess, diagnose and proscribe educational goals and instruction? Or was training limited to knowing a set of criteria and key words to look for in a program's written material?

It was evident in comparing the Kindergarten review with the First-grade review from the language used and written expressions that one evaluator was significantly more knowledgeable and informed than the other evaluator.

There seemed to be a significant allowance for subjective interpretation of Program materials, intent and application of the Indicators.

### **Subjective vs. Objective definition of terms:** (Examples below – resulted in point deduction)

“Design” of materials: Does this mean color, shape, outline, form vs. format?

Frequency: Daily, weekly, monthly or “as needed to achieve proficiency”?

Segmenting: written or oral exercise or both?

**Supplemental vs. Full ELA Program:** No clarification was offered regarding the difference between Supplemental Foundational Reading programs and ELA core program blocks – what components should be considered in each program? The evaluation of PTR was as a Supplemental Program.

**Rubric construct and scoring:** If “all” indicator points were not evident in the written materials the rubric scoring was an automatic 50% loss of possible points.

Example: On several indicators 3-5 positive elements were cited and only 1 negative element yet the rubric score was only 50% of possible points (1 of 2 or 2 of 4).

### **Conclusion:**

The EdReports evaluation was a fairly negative experience for PTR due to limited dialogue, differing understanding of PA and Phonics, rigidity of assigning points, and misunderstandings about the evaluation process as to what should be included in the review.

We requested a copy of the Summary Statement of the Evaluation prior to publication but it was not received. It is difficult to write a response when we don't know what the summary of the evaluation contains. Previous summary statements of other programs focused on what was missing or negative aspects of the program.

A complete, extensive evaluation of PTR that considers all components of the program is the only way to know and have a complete understanding of PTR effectiveness in teaching the Common Core Standards for Foundational Reading.