

## Planning for and Leading a Research-based Literacy Program: Considerations for System Leaders

Foothills School Division, Golden Hills School Division and University of Calgary

The intent of a CASS Learning Guide is to apply research, deepen understanding and enhance professional practice within the Alberta context. With a focus on optimum learning for all students, a Learning Guide provides an opportunity to grow system leader knowledge, resulting in quality school leadership and quality teaching throughout Alberta.

### Summary

Jeff Grimsdale from Golden Hills School Division began the session by framing the learning in relation to the Superintendent and Leadership professional practice competencies. He emphasised system leaders' role in *leading learning* and the importance of supporting school leaders and teachers in creating optimum learning environments for all students. Sue Humphry, also from Golden Hills School Division, as well as Dr. Miriam Ramzy from Foothills School Division and Michelle Bence, Ph.D. Candidate from the University of Calgary shared their research and practice focused on leading a system literacy program.

[Watch full recording here.](#)

The Layers of Reading Development (Ramzy, M., & Bence, M. (2022). Literacy instruction through the Layers of Reading Development. *Early Childhood Education*, 48(1). framed the research and practice represented in the presentation. This research, represented in the image shared, provides the context and foundation for making decisions around program direction, intervention frameworks and resource allocation. The model is comprehensive and complex referencing dynamic systems learning theory that identifies social cultural perspectives that influence how students learn. "There are multiple sources of influence on children's learning... these sources interact in different ways, having large effects on literacy learning." Connor et al 2014



Literacy instruction in Golden Hills School Division reflects the complex and multidimensional view of literacy. The five components of literacy are woven

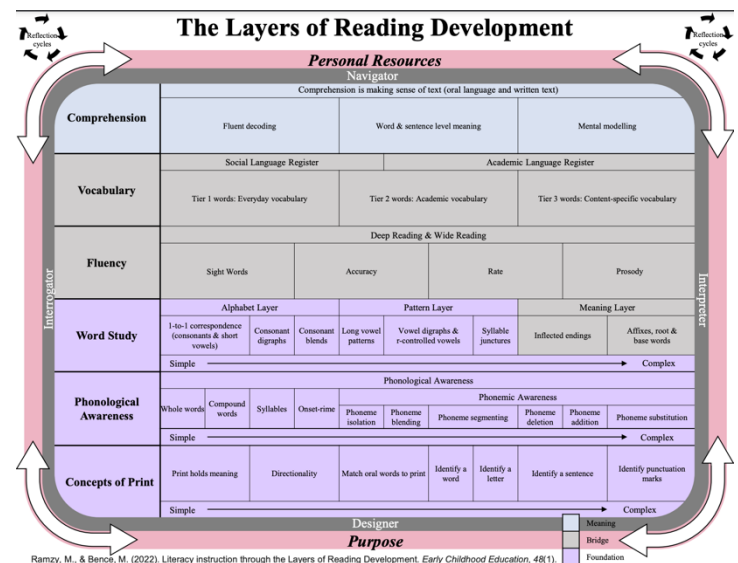
together to create a comprehensive program. The districts' goal for literacy instruction is to help students use literacy to gain knowledge, critically analyze information/ideas, express themselves and create new knowledge.



Dr. Miriam Ramzy shared how Foothills School Division conceptualizes literacy through the Layers of Reading that represents the core processes of literacy. (Concepts of print, phonological awareness, word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.) Based on this researched comprehensive approach district leaders also recognize that. "... Effective instruction is highly complex and that optimal patterns of instruction differ for each child across a continuum." Connor et al 2019.

Dr. Ramzy reinforced that these processes are not a hierarchy or taught in isolation from one another. The Layers of Reading image and research, created in collaboration with Michelle Bence, from University of Calgary is a multidimensional approach that is complex and comprehensive.

[Larger image of Layers of Reading Development](#)



### Acknowledgements

This guide was developed by CASS based on content presented by system education leaders at a CASS Conference 2021-2022. Professional thanks to Jeff Grimsdale and Sue Humphry Golden Hills, Dr. Miriam Ramzy Foothills, and Michelle Bence, Ph.D. Candidate from the University of Calgary. This guide is provided in support of improved system leadership capacity and under the following Creative Commons license.



The presenters collaborated to develop a tool that system leaders can use to support school leaders, lead teachers and teachers. The tool is intended to provide “look fors” during classroom observations and that supports reflection on effective literacy practices and to identify areas for growth. The tool was well received by participants as a resource that models a more comprehensive approach to literacy learning, one that does not focus on just one aspect of literacy or one program.

Delegates responded to presenters’ reflection questions related to the role of the system leader in supporting literacy learning. Responses included the importance or value of:

- creating a system goal, based on research, about the importance of literacy and numeracy learning
- supporting the understanding of the system goal and pedagogical practices that are coherent with the goal prior to purchasing resources
- Layers of Reading allows for the “why” of literacy learning and where different programs and interventions fit in relation to a comprehensive approach.



[Access Tool](#)

## Questions for Reflection and System Leadership Team Dialogue

## Additional Supports for System Leadership Capacity

### Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to be literate? How does your school authority identify the value of literacy learning?
2. In relation to leading literacy learning for school leaders and teachers what are your roles as a system leader?
3. Based on your students and teachers needs how might you enhance your own skills and practices to support literacy learning in your school authority?

[Session Google folder](#) with resources (Literacy Look for Tool, Layers of Reading Visual) and slide deck

### [Layers of Literacy](#)

Connecting theory and practice to support teachers as they plan for instruction.



### [CASS Resource Library](#)

Search Learning Guides: Ministerial Order on Student Learning, Curriculum, Implementation, Literacy and Numeracy

[CASS Planning for Implementation](#) includes Alberta resources to support Comprehensive Professional Learning and Implementation Planning