

# education**VIEWS**

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## **Blak** to the future

Professional development liftout

Education debate in spotlight

Queensland the Smart State



Queensland  
Government

Department of  
Education, Training  
and the Arts

## ACADEMIC VIEWS



Read on ... Research shows solid oral vocabulary and language skills are important for reading.

# Reading problems linked to language skills

Historically, reading disorders have been diagnosed and treated as separate and distinct from other learning disabilities.

However, researchers, educators, and therapists have long recognised the strong correlation between reading and language disorders.

Now our knowledge of how the human brain is organised for language and reading processes helps to explain the link between oral language and reading.

For most of us, language is primarily a left hemisphere function. Regions of the left hemisphere's frontal lobe are active in most complex language activities.

Language problems most often also cause reading disorders. The simple explanation for this is reading ability is superimposed on language. That is, the same brain regions we use to learn and use language are also those used when we later learn to read.

Reading is, after all, written language.

It comes as no surprise then that children who have trouble learning oral language compared with their peers, regardless of what the cause might be, also have trouble learning to read.

Solid language base helps reading  
New research points to the importance of both oral vocabulary and high-level language skills in building reading comprehension.

Reading accuracy, speed, and comprehension at any age require a



**DR MARTHA BURNS** has been a practising speech language pathologist in Chicago for 35 years. A faculty member of both Northwestern University and the University of Illinois, Dr Burns has published several books and a number of articles on the brain and language. Here she discusses the links between oral language and reading disorders in young children.

solid oral language foundation.

Regardless of the cause, a child who tries to superimpose reading on a limited or immature language base, whether due to phonological, semantic, or syntactic limitations, will experience some degree of failure.

Early identification leads to prevention

Preventing reading failure in school-age children depends on identification and remediation of emergent language problems in toddlers and preschool-age children.

In theory, if 73 per cent of youngsters with reading impairments have a history of delayed language milestones, and 75 per cent of preschoolers with language impairment go on to develop significant reading problems, we could prevent about three-quarters of reading problems with adequate language remediation provided at an early age.

Unfortunately, the answer is not that simple.

So far, traditional speech-language therapy alone has not been shown to reduce the risk of reading failure in children with specific language impairment. Similarly, there is evidence that phonological awareness training alone is not sufficient for increasing reading comprehension skills among children at risk for reading failure.

Reading research repeatedly points to the importance of a broad range of language skills – phonologic, semantic, syntactic, and metalinguistics, as well as good verbal working memory – for successful reading.

A checklist to help educators and parents identify language and reading impairment in children from preschool through to high school age is at [www.fastforword.com.au](http://www.fastforword.com.au)

*Dr Burns will speak at education conference, Re-wiring The Brain For Academic Gain, in Melbourne on August 16 and Sydney on August 17.* [www.fastforword.com.au/conference](http://www.fastforword.com.au/conference)

## Aids for teacher aides

### Professional development prospects

Queensland teacher aides looking to boost their skills can apply for up to 30 professional development grants available through the New Professionalism program.

The Professional Development Grants for Teachers Aides are valued at \$1200 each and recognise the outstanding work of teacher aides in our state schools.

The grants give teacher aides a chance to refresh and update their skills and knowledge by undertaking professional development activities later this year and next year.

Professional Development Branch director Penny Bedson said the Department of Education, Training and the Arts was committed to providing staff with reward and recognition programs and quality professional development opportunities.

'We are excited to be offering a range of professional development scholarships and grants through New Professionalism,' Ms Bedson said.

'While these grants recognise our teacher aides, a suite of awards and scholarships for teachers and school leaders will also be promoted in the coming weeks.

'These initiatives acknowledge and encourage the talents of our employees and provide opportunities for them to extend their particular areas of expertise and interest.'

Local presentations of grants will

coincide with Teacher Aides' Day on September 7.

[www.education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/newprofessionalism/index.html](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/newprofessionalism/index.html)

### New level rolls out

Teacher aides will benefit from the release this month of Stage 3 of the new classification level, Teacher Aide OO4 (TAOO4).

The new pay point recognises the extra responsibility and complexity of the role performed by some teacher aides.

From July 16, principals will be provided with access to an application kit for the TAOO4 Stage 3 release.

Principals are required to consult with teacher aides to determine if a TAOO4 role exists at the school.

If a potential TAOO4 role is identified, it is the principal's responsibility to forward an application to their regional human resource manager by August 17.

The TAOO4 positions will be identified within the existing teacher aide cohort.

Successful teacher aides from the Stage 3 release will commence in the TAOO4 role from Term 1 next year.

The Stage 3 release follows the successful implementation of the first two stages, which saw more than 500 TAOO4 roles allocated to schools across the state in a variety of areas, including classroom support, literacy and numeracy, library, special needs and behaviour support.

[www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/taoo4.html](http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/taoo4.html)

## Researching reforms

The Department has commissioned research on the effect of school reform initiatives on teaching and learning.

A Queensland University research team will conduct two projects: one on current initiatives in schools such as the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework, and the other on classroom practice and its relationship to student outcomes during the middle years of schooling.

The studies will include surveys of teachers, parents, and students, follow-up interviews and focus groups, and observations of classroom practice.

Up to 110 state schools and 24 non-state schools will take part.

For more information contact Strategic Policy and Performance principal research officer Dr Angela Ferguson on 3237 0426 or [angela.ferguson@det.qld.gov.au](mailto:angela.ferguson@det.qld.gov.au)

[www.education.qld.gov.au/corporate/research/schools\\_update.html](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/corporate/research/schools_update.html)