

Background Information for *The Superkids Reading Program*

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About *The Superkids Reading Program*

The Superkids Reading Program for grades K–2 is based on decades of research about how children learn to read. Author Pleasant Rowland originally published *Superkids* in 1978, based on respected reading research and years of her own classroom experience. Today, findings of the National Reading Panel and other current research verify the principles and practices of the original reading program that resulted from Ms. Rowland’s teaching and study.

The nonprofit Rowland Reading Foundation was formed in 2003 to improve primary reading instruction and reintroduce *Superkids*. Since that time, the program has been continually improved with feedback from teachers and evidence-based research. It is now published by Zaner-Bloser.

The background information that follows documents the research base of *Superkids*, evidence of the program’s efficacy, and the implementation services Zaner-Bloser provides in support of the program.

Research Base

Foundational Skills

To understand text, readers must employ both word recognition and language comprehension. In early grades, when children are just beginning to unlock the alphabetic code, particular attention must be given to teaching the foundational skills to build word recognition capability. Once the process of decoding becomes automatic and fluent, more brain energy can be devoted to comprehension. In fluent reading, language comprehension develops and expands, enabling children to constantly broaden their understanding of more sophisticated text.

Superkids is a comprehensive, phonics-based reading program that explicitly and systematically teaches children how to become fluent, automatic readers. The strength of *Superkids*’ instruction in automaticity and fluency provides the essential foundation children need for comprehension, building confident readers able to focus on the meaning of complex texts. As children develop automaticity and fluency in word recognition, *Superkids* instruction also teaches the comprehension skills appropriate to each stage of their development as readers.

Children with **print awareness** understand that writing on a page has meaning and the meaning is related to spoken language, and they recognize that text is made up of words, words are made of letters, and spaces are used to separate words. Understanding basic **print concepts** is an important part of learning how to read. *Superkids* teaches print concepts explicitly in kindergarten as children learn to print the upper- and lowercase form of each letter of the alphabet and associate the letters with sounds; children’s letter formation and their knowledge of sentence conventions are taught, practiced, and reinforced through first grade.

Phonological awareness is the understanding that speech consists of smaller units, such as words, syllables, onsets and rimes, and individual speech sounds of phonemes. To be able to read and spell with success, *Superkids* develops children’s phonological awareness and **phonemic awareness** in particular. Children are taught to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds in spoken words.

In kindergarten, children are taught one sound for each letter of the alphabet and practice isolating, identifying, blending, segmenting, and substituting phonemes in various positions in spoken words. In first grade, *Superkids* teaches the remaining English phonemes, including the sounds of consonant digraphs, long vowels, *r*-controlled vowels, and other variant vowels. In grade 2, *Superkids* reviews and gives more practice with all 44 phonemes to ensure mastery.

Superkids’ **phonics** instruction initially focuses on teaching the alphabetic principle—that the symbols of written language represent the sounds of spoken language. In kindergarten, learning letter-sound relationships enables children to decode (read) and encode (spell) phonetically regular words that follow predictable patterns—the majority of words in the English language. Children repeatedly practice applying their letter-sound knowledge to decodable text that consistently results in words they know. Relying first and foremost on decoding allows children to really read, rather than guess at words. As children’s decoding becomes more automatic and fluent, they expend less energy processing print and can devote more energy to comprehension.

As children secure the essential grapheme-phoneme correspondences, word-study instruction moves to morphological units and patterns, applied in both reading and spelling. Nothing is left to chance; by the time children progress from grade K to grade 2, all phonetic elements are thoroughly taught, practiced, and applied in authentic reading, writing, and spelling.

Practice and recursive review are carefully built in so that children have constant reinforcement of all phonetic elements taught earlier.

Fluency instruction builds students’ ability to read a text accurately, smoothly, and with natural expression. Fluent readers can focus on understanding what they read rather than on recognizing words. *Superkids* employs effective techniques for developing fluency, including proving models of fluent reading and many opportunities for children to read short passages aloud multiple times. Explicit fluency instruction teaches children when to group words into meaningful phrases, use punctuation as a guide for when to pause or place emphasis, and read with natural expression at an appropriate rate.

Reading Literature and Informational Text

As children are acquiring an understanding of the alphabetic principle and learning to associate letters with sounds, they read decodable text that contain letter-sounds they've been taught. Reading decodable text helps ensure children develop a strong decoding strategy based on letter-sound correspondences, the most reliable strategy for reading unfamiliar words.

The **literature** in *Superkids* grows in complexity along with children's decoding and comprehension skills. The decodable stories in grades K–1 increase in length and include longer words and sentences and more text per page. Second graders transition to reading uncontrolled text and read chapter books that challenge them with more complex levels of meaning, structures, language, and knowledge demands. Children learn specific skills and strategies to improve their comprehension of literary text.

Informational text builds children's knowledge and vocabulary in science, social studies, and other content areas. Children learn how to navigate and comprehend informational texts using specific skills and strategies. Instruction includes building background prior to reading, asking questions to guide children's understanding as they read, and teaching about informational text features and structures.

Superkids develops children's skills for understanding informational texts read aloud to them and texts they read themselves. Skills include identifying main ideas and supporting details, summarizing key information, using pictures and text features, comparing and contrasting, recognizing cause and effect, understanding an author's purpose and reasons, and more.

Writing

The complex process of **writing** requires a combination of high-level cognitive skills, plus handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills. Because writing is such a challenging task, children need explicit instruction and lots of practice to become proficient. Explicit writing instruction includes teaching mechanics, writing process, and how to write different text types—narratives, opinions, and informational texts.

Children learn how to use the writing process to create finished pieces. They work with their teacher or a partner to revise and edit their writing and use revision checklists. Children share their writing regularly and are encouraged to add to their work based on their classmates' feedback. Genre-specific rubrics support self-reflection and authentic assessment.

Language Skills

In *Superkids*, **grammar, usage, and mechanics** skills are taught and then practiced during word work activities, reading discussion, and writing assignments. Children's speech and writing are expected to reflect their growing knowledge of grammar and usage. Mechanics skills taught include punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. **Spelling** is taught and reinforced every day. In all grades, children learn to encode letters to stand for the letter-sounds they are taught. In first

and second grade, children are also taught sound-spelling patterns, spelling rules, and how to spell a number of high-frequency, phonetically irregular memory words.

Superkids teaches **vocabulary** indirectly through everyday experiences with language and directly through instruction on specific words and word-learning strategies. Children learn about synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and categories of related words. Grades 1–2 students learn to use context clues, analyze word parts, and use a dictionary.

Speaking and Listening

Best practices for **speaking and listening** are explicitly taught and reinforced during writing lessons in all grade levels of the *Superkids* program. Speaking and listening skills are also integrated into guided reading lessons in the *Superkids* program.

For more on the program’s research base, go to <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/0c8772a7>.

Evidence of Efficacy

At its inception in 2003, the Rowland Reading Foundation committed to undertaking scientific research about *The Superkids Reading Program*. The scale of research grew steadily over the years. To date, research has been conducted in nearly every region of the United States and with every major student group. The research studies have been conducted by independent evaluators and by the Rowland Reading Foundation.

To review efficacy studies, go to <https://www.superkidsreading.com/k-2-reading/research.php>.

Implementation Services

Adopting a comprehensive literacy curriculum is an important and long-term commitment. In support of adoptions of *Superkids*, Zaner-Bloser partners with schools and districts to provide the very best professional learning and implementation services.

Working together in true partnership with schools, Zaner-Bloser designs plans for collaborative, job-embedded, classroom-focused professional learning that are fulfilling, enjoyable, and impact teachers’ knowledge and practice. Implementation services for *Superkids* include grade-level implementation training, coaching visits, and administrator training.

To learn more about implementation services, go to <https://www.zaner-bloser.com/professional-development/reading.php>.