



President's Viewpoint Teaching the First R: Is There a *Best* Way?

Stop the sound and fury of the phonics vs. whole language war. We need both.



In my last column, I invited *NEA Today* readers to send me their thoughts about the best way to teach reading. Many of you responded. In almost every one of your comments, I found two central themes.

First, beware of the "one true method" imposed from on high! Different children learn to read differently. As school psychologist Philip Bowser from Roseburg, Oregon, put it, "Reading is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon!"

And Jim Buchanan, a reading teacher from Woodhull, New York, warns that the reading debate has been poisoned by self-righteous individuals who believe they are in sole possession of the truth.

"None of us has the truth," he says. "We can only hope to move toward better understandings by putting our most cherished beliefs on the line and letting them stand or fall in the crucible of our own classrooms."

Second, you said balance is the key. Kim Schneider, an elementary teacher from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, echoed the sentiments of many when she wrote: "It should not be a debate of phonics or whole language, but how we combine every possible option to create the ultimate learning environment for children."

Another reader suggested I take a look at the Success for All program. So I did, and I liked what I learned.

Now 10 years old, Success for All operates in 460 schools in 100 districts and 31 states. At the very heart of Success for All's instructional program is an intensive reading curriculum that fuses phonics and a whole language--or story-based--approach.

Students in Success for All schools score noticeably higher on reading tests than their counterparts in similar schools with mostly at-risk students.

I was particularly impressed with the program's tutoring element. Success for All students are evaluated every eight weeks, and the lowest achievers in their grade are tutored--one-on-one, 20 minutes every day for however long it takes, by certified teachers with backgrounds in reading or by highly trained paraprofessionals.

To learn more about Success for All, send an E-mail message to bcoppersm@csos.jhu.edu or write to the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

Now, I'm not suggesting that Success for All is the one and only program for everyone. There are other programs worth considering.

For example, James Comer's School Development Program is impressive. For a review of Comer's latest book, check out page 45.

The most important consideration is finding what works in the crucible of our own classrooms. We all know that the child who falls behind in reading is a child in serious trouble--in school and probably in life.

On the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test, 29 percent of white fourth graders scored below the basic level, as did 69 percent of African-American students and 64 percent of Hispanic students.

We can't expect public education to endure in America when a majority of minority children and a sizable minority of white children are not even learning to read at the basic level.

True, some children grow up in neighborhoods where there are more liquor stores than bookstores and in homes where there are more television sets than books. I understand that. But for us that is a challenge, not an excuse.

We now know that early and intensive reading instruction by skilled teachers in small classes, using phonics and whole language methods with tutorial backup, will succeed.

At this point in history, the only thing of value to be gained from the holy war between phonics and whole language is a deeper appreciation that education has become way too politicized. There is no reason on earth why teaching children to read should be a partisan or ideological issue.

To motivate children to read, NEA is sponsoring Read Across America, a nationwide event like no other. On March 2, 1998--Dr. Seuss's birthday--we are calling for every child in every school in every community to be in the company of a book.

We're also intensifying our efforts to focus the needed resources on children learning to read in kindergarten and the early grades.

Our Association intends to keep the spotlight on reading. Thank you for your encouragement.

CAN WE TALK?

Are safety and discipline problems in your school? What works? What doesn't? Send an E-mail message to me at BobChase@nea.org with your thoughts. Thanks.

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"Lots of Bull but No Beef"

by AFT President Albert Shanker
May 12, 1996

If people made fortunes with their schemes for reforming the schools, we'd have a healthy crop of school-reform millionaires. Year after year, new proposals appear. Some get enough support to be put into practice. But then, sooner or later, they disappear, leaving the schools substantially unchanged. This story of education reforms that come and go is not even a new one, as Stanley Pogrow, a professor at the University of Arizona, points out in his upcoming article, "Reforming the Wannabe Reformers" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1996).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Pogrow reminds us, open classrooms and community-based education were at the cutting edge of school reform. In those days, we also heard that performance contracting would significantly improve student achievement and that decentralization was the answer to the problems of the New York City schools. Decentralization is probably the only one of these reforms people still recognize; after limping along for years, it is finally about to be put down. And Pogrow is pretty sure that our current favorites--"whole language, vouchers, heterogeneous grouping, teacher empowerment, authentic assessment, and team teaching"--will follow suit. (Indeed, whole language has already lost much of the support it enjoyed in the 1980s.) Some of the reforms that fail deserve to, but some promising ideas sink along with the bad ones.

What accounts for the low success rate among education reforms? It's not that educators have a worse track record than people in other fields. Creating innovations that work and also last is very difficult. The big problem with the "reform/academic/research community" (Pogrow refers to it as REAR) is that the reforms these people come up with seldom attempt to deal with the details of classroom instruction. It's as though someone decided that a horseless carriage would be a great idea and went around selling people on it but never got around to figuring out how to make a carriage that would run without a horse.

Members of the REAR community, Pogrow says, are strong on philosophical principles and advocacy but weak on figuring out how to put their ideas into the classroom. The statement "All students can learn" may be true--I believe it is--but *what* can they learn? and *how* do we teach it so that they can learn it? Without answers to these questions, the statement is silly and empty. Pogrow cites middle school reform, with its emphasis on child-centered curricula, as an example of the reform/academic/research community's unwillingness to get down to brass tacks:

Thousands of articles and speeches have advocated the development of child-centered curricula. I recently completed a three-year study to identify exemplary middle school curricula.... The only exemplary math curriculum was 20 years old, and the only exemplary comprehensive science curriculum was Canadian. There were no exemplary comprehensive language arts or social studies curricula. While everyone has been philosophizing about what middle school curricula should look like, no one has bothered to develop them, despite 40 years of advocacy. The basic tools that are needed aren't there; there is a lot of bull but no beef.

Pogrow calls what is needed, and usually lacking, "technology." Technology is not just equipment; it consists of "highly specific, systematic, and structural methodologies with supporting materials of tremendously high quality"--in other words, the details for putting a theory into action and the

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Pogrow calls what is needed, and usually lacking, "technology." Technology is not just equipment; it consists of "highly specific, systematic, and structural methodologies with supporting materials of tremendously high quality"--in other words, the details for putting a theory into action and the

means for doing so. The Calvert School program, which offers a carefully structured, day-by-day curriculum, complete with strategies for presenting the topics, examples and questions for teachers to use, and the necessary materials, is a "technology" in Pogrow's terms.

How can we account for the failure by members of the REAR community to create the "basic tools" their reforms need in order to work? Pogrow has a number of answers. For one thing, according to the REAR view, applying a theory should be left up to the practitioners. This sounds as though it is respectful of teacher "autonomy" and "professionalism." In fact, it is a set-up. How do you know a theory is worth anything until you grapple with the details of putting it into practice? Besides, this (conveniently) leaves all the hard work to the practitioners. As Pogrow points out,

It is far more difficult to figure out how to implement theory than it is to generate it.... Thus it makes no sense to expect practitioners to develop their own techniques for implementing a complex reform idea.... This is not a criticism of educators. No other field expects its practitioners to develop the techniques that they practice.... In medicine, if individual practitioners invent their own procedures, we call it "malpractice."

In fact, Pogrow continues, "The equivalent of expecting teachers to develop the interventions they are going to apply [is] asking an actor to perform Shakespeare--but to write the play first."

Pogrow's point is not that the REAR community is self-indulgent or that the people who adopt its reforms are careless. He is saying that a reform proposal can only be as good as the "technology" that underpins it. And if we hope to break the cycle of reforms that fail, it's a message we must absorb.

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ED379637 95 Gifted Readers and Reading Instruction. ERIC Digest.

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Questions about gifted readers and how best to teach them have been posed since the inception of gifted education. Do gifted readers require distinctive educational programs?

In the opinion of Margaret McIntosh (1982), an educator who reviewed the history of gifted education in the United States, the gifted reader, often overlooked in traditional reading programs, is in need of a specific kind of reading instruction. McIntosh reports that able readers have interests in reading that distinguish them from other readers--their preferences include science, history, biography, travel, poetry, and informational texts like atlases and encyclopedias. Current research reported in "USA Today" (30 March 1995) indicates that gifted elementary school children who participate in special programs do better academically than their gifted peers not in any program. This is one of the reasons that gifted readers should have a differentiated reading program. This Digest will discuss some of the aspects of differentiated reading instruction for the gifted.

SALIENT POINTS

In reviewing the professional literature on reading instruction for gifted readers, several salient points about gifted readers emerge. They are that (1) gifted readers usually master basic reading skills by the time they come to school and are ready for complex concepts at an early age; (2) gifted readers tend to have an internal locus of control--they believe that achievement is the result of their own ability and behavior; (3) gifted readers need instruction in reading that is different from a regular classroom program; (4) instruction for very able readers should focus on developing higher cognitive level comprehension skills; (5) teaching reading to gifted readers requires more than a skills-oriented approach; (6) books for gifted readers should be selected on the basis of quality language--books that use varied and complex language structures are a primary source of cognitive growth; (7) reading programs for gifted readers should foster a desire to read; and (8) a reading program for gifted readers should include a variety of reading materials and strategies which are based on the present needs and demands of the reader, not on the chronological age or grade level.

Jackson (1988) concluded that precocious reading ability is a complex skill, and that levels of specific subskills vary widely among individuals. She urges parents to encourage their gifted readers to pursue natural and enjoyable reading activities. When the gifted reader enters school, instruction must go beyond the traditional basal program, and the focus of reading programs for gifted readers should be on critical and creative thinking.

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE READING

Critical reading goes beyond the level of comprehension--it requires the reader to evaluate material and ascertain its worthiness, reasonableness, and usefulness. Through critical engagement with text, gifted readers are encouraged to view reading as a thinking process, as well as a language process.

Creative reading is the epitome of higher level reading. Going beyond critical reading, creative reading invites an imaginative interaction with print. New ideas are originated, examined, and applied. Teachers of gifted readers can help readers interact with texts in ways which will promote critical and creative reading. Encouraging wide reading confirms for the gifted reader that reading is for learning and enjoyment.

READING PROGRAMS

According to Levande (1993), "reading programs for the gifted should take into account the individual characteristics of the children, capitalize on the gifts they possess, and expand and challenge their abilities." Shaughnessy (1994) also recommends expanded literacy activities, such as guest speakers in the

classroom, creative writing, and tie-ins of books with television or movies.

Most schools and teachers have the leeway to choose the instructional method and materials or gifted reading program that best fit their students' needs. There are several diverse specially designed programs that are popular with many school districts. Dooley (1993) cautions that "a stimulating reading program for gifted readers has at least two major components: provisions for mastering the basic curriculum quickly through curriculum compacting, and a differentiated curriculum created through modifications of the content and the processes used to explore that content." We will return to Dooley's points a little later in this Digest.

Levande (1993) cites the triad enrichment model, inquiry reading, and the Junior Great Books Reading and Discussion Program as being used most frequently in American classrooms.

The triad enrichment model is based on giving gifted children the opportunity for self-directed reading and independent study. The enrichment triad incorporates three types of activities: (1) exploratory activities in which students examine areas of interest and then decide on a problem or topic to study in depth; (2) activities in which students are provided with the technical skills and thinking processes needed to investigate the research topic selected in the first step; and (3) activities in which students explore their topic through individual or small group work. The end result should be a product which documents the student's learning process (Levande, 1993).

Inquiry reading is a 4-week program which enables the gifted reader to research a topic in which he/she is actively interested. The program is geared for third grade and above. The student selects the topic, researches it, and presents his/her findings to the other students. Levande (1993) points out that this approach can be used in a classroom that uses basal readers, during the time that the basals are being used by most of the students.

The Junior Great Books Program offers a series of literature readings for grades 2 through 12 (Halsted, 1990). It is a well-known and venerable program, complex and highly structured, and challenging for the student.

Levande also advocates investigating the following recommended instructional models for gifted readers: AIME, reading-strategy lessons, DRTA (Directed Reading Teaching Activity), and vocabulary development through literature.

WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

With the current emphasis on whole language instruction comes the elimination of ability grouping and thus, a special challenge for educating the gifted reader. Ganopole (1988) advocates a certain degree of flexibility in reading instruction in whole language classrooms, and emphasizes the use of authentic materials in meaningful contexts, a modified use of basals, acceptance of divergent student responses, etc.

Dooley (1993) mentions the extra effort needed to provide appropriate reading instruction for the gifted reader in whole language classrooms. She argues for curriculum compacting and a differentiated curriculum--points mentioned earlier in this Digest.

Curriculum compacting is a "systematic process through which proficiency in the basic curriculum is assured and time is made available for enrichment and acceleration" (Dooley, 1993). Students are first assessed on their mastery of the skills to be taught in the next reading unit--if they have already mastered those skills, they do not participate in the unit. To facilitate the learning of concepts and skills that have not yet been mastered, students might be asked to join the group when those particular skills are being taught, or the skills could be explained individually or in small groups of students. Another method might be the use of structured materials that deal with the concept (Dooley, 1993).

"When curriculum compacting is implemented, many highly able readers have time available for participating in a differentiated reading program. This program should not be more of the regular program. Instead it should focus on content and process modifications that reflect gifted students' instructional needs" (Dooley, 1993). Such modifications can give students the chance to read in depth on a theme or

topic, even if it is not part of the regular curriculum.

Eppelle (1989) and Shaughnessy (1993) offer two bibliographies which provide many sources of information on the gifted reader in the classroom.

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ED358750 93 Current Terms in Adult ESL Literacy. ERIC Digest.
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"Whole language," "learner-centered," and "participatory" are terms often heard in discussions of language and literacy learning. They may be used as catchwords without a clear articulation of the underlying concepts to which they refer and of the forms they take in actual literacy programs. This digest defines these concepts and discusses their application to adult learning in ESL literacy programs.

THE WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH

Ken Goodman is one of the educators most often associated with the term "whole language" and one of the earliest and principle advocates of the whole language approach as we know it today. Goodman (1986) described whole language as a "top-to-bottom," rather than a "bottom-up," view of language learning, a view that does not break language into bits and pieces. Language is taught in real and natural contexts, and thus, language learning is easier and more interesting and relevant to the learner. Rather than depend on basal readers, textbooks, and workbooks that often stress decontextualized language exercises, whole language teachers build on learners' existing knowledge and work with learners on authentic reading and writing activities, such as reading trade books, writing letters, or developing and working on extended writing projects. Learners, therefore, develop control over the mechanics of language through real reading and real writing.

Whole language, however, cannot be reduced to a set of activities or strategies, but instead involves basic assumptions about how students learn. Whole language practitioners believe that language is a social process that is learned as we interact within a given context; that students bring knowledge to the classroom that should be valued, respected, and built upon; that language learning involves risk, and students should be encouraged to try and try again if they fail; and that form follows function in language development and not vice versa.

The whole language movement originated with elementary educators. How can these principles apply to the teaching of adults learning English? A teacher in an adult literacy program can incorporate a whole language approach first by recognizing that most adults already know a great deal about how language works. Even though they may not be able to read or write proficiently in English, adult ESL students come to literacy programs with many years of experiences that have developed their world knowledge, oral language, and reading and writing and have shaped their views of what literacy is and how and why it is learned.

One of the first steps a whole language teacher should take is to share with learners his or her views on how language is learned. The notion that literacy is functional and contextual should be emphasized, as many adults come to the classroom with the notion that literacy is an academic hurdle to overcome rather than a tool for larger goals or everyday needs. Finally, learners should be encouraged to take risks and develop their literacy in ways that are relevant to their personal situations. This elaboration of assumptions about whole language opens the way for the teacher to introduce activities such as journal and letter writing, the language experience approach (see Taylor, 1992), and story writing and publishing, rather than focusing on drills and grammar exercises.

Some educators have learners write personal stories reflecting their experiences--sorrows, joys, problems, and memories--and publish them to use as a basis for additional reading, writing, and discussion activities (see Peyton, 1991, for examples).

Authentic reading that is meaningful and of interest to learners is also part of the whole language approach. As Smith (1983) points out, "The only way to make learning to read easy is to make reading easy" (p.23). By this he means that students learn to read only by reading and focusing on meaning and not primarily

focusing on words, pronunciation, speed, or accuracy.

Because standardized tests are not a major part of the whole language classroom, teachers in whole language literacy programs use alternative measures of evaluation that are integrated into the daily classroom activities and thus reflect the use of language in real contexts. Such measures include, for example, the holistic examination of learner stories, learner self-observation forms, and journals. Comprehensive reviews of alternative measures of evaluation in adult ESL and family literacy programs may be found in Holt (in press) and Wrigley (1992).

THE LEARNER CENTERED APPROACH

In a learner-centered approach, "learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught" (Nunan, 1988, p. 2). Jurmo (1989) points out that there are different levels of learner participation. A learner may participate by simply signing up for a course and being physically present. What is aimed for, however, is the highest level of participation, in which learners have considerable control and responsibility for classroom activities.

A learner-centered approach, also referred to as a student-centered or worker-centered approach, involves collaboration between teachers and learners; through ongoing dialogue, they determine the content of the curriculum and the learning objectives. This approach focuses on learners' real-life needs; learner responsibility in setting personal and realistic goals and determining the steps toward achieving those goals; flexibility--as students progress and reflect on their learning, content and goals may be modified; and learner self-assessment.

Learner-centered curriculum development thus differs from traditional curriculum development methods, in which the planning process takes place in advance without student input, and a lockstep order for instruction and evaluation is followed. A learner-centered curriculum complements and extends the whole language approach. It incorporates the notion that literacy is functional and contextual, and it uses learners' background knowledge and experiences as a starting point for curriculum development. It extends whole language beliefs by emphasizing that language learning is a collaborative effort between teacher and learner, characterized by ongoing dialogue to determine the content and learning objectives for the course.

Huerta-Macias (in press) provides an example of a learner-centered orientation in an adult literacy program. A pre-program meeting and individual interviews were held at each program site with those families who had enrolled, to learn about their goals, needs, and interests. The curriculum themes were then designed around the expressed desires of the participating families. This curriculum and the learning activities were modified at several sites during the course of the project, as a result of ongoing dialogue between staff and families and of specific circumstances that developed. At one site, for example, a lesson on plants evolved into a discussion and corresponding learning activities on the medicinal use of herbs and plants, a subject about which the parents knew a lot and which was interesting and relevant to them. At another site, a lesson on personal hygiene was developed because several cases of hepatitis broke out during the project.

THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The participatory approach was popularized by the work of Paulo Freire, an educator who developed the approach while working with peasant groups in Brazil (see Spener, 1990). Freire stressed in his writings that the prior experiences, knowledge, strengths, and community concerns of the learners must be the starting point for literacy instruction. Freire also stressed the use of literacy development for personal transformation and social action. A participatory approach not only develops words and themes meaningful to learners, but also extends those themes and activities into action that will better the learners' lives.

The term "participatory" is often used interchangeably with "learner-centered." Indeed, the participatory approach is also a learner-centered approach in that the content and learning objectives are determined through ongoing dialogue between teacher and learners. The participatory approach, however, goes beyond a learner-centered approach because it advocates literacy as a vehicle for personal transformation and social change. Learners discuss issues in class that are significant to them and determine ways of dealing with these issues in real life. Learners are seen as agents for change, for bettering their lives and the lives

of those close to them. This may involve a parent using literacy to help a child with her schooling or to advocate for the child within the school. Thus, the participatory approach extends the themes discussed in class to action outside the classroom.

Educators have elaborated extensively on the participatory approach to literacy. Auerbach (1992), for example, writes about the importance of social context as a resource that informs literacy development. She notes that if educators define literacy broadly, to include a range of activities and practices that are integrated into the fabric of daily life, the social context becomes a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning.

Fingeret (1989) defines participatory literacy education as a philosophy and a set of practices "based on the belief that learners--their characteristics, aspirations, backgrounds, and needs--should be at the center of literacy instruction....[Learners] help to define, create, and maintain the program" (p.5). For example, a teacher may learn from a Hispanic family that their children have been raised to value cooperative, rather than individual, work. Thus, rather than viewing the child's hesitancy to engage in competitive behavior in the class in a negative light, the teacher appreciates this cultural difference and provides more opportunities for this child to engage in group work within the class.

An example of the application of a participatory approach to curriculum development in a family literacy program can be seen in Auerbach (1992), who describes a program in Boston. The process, which she stresses is cyclical and not linear, includes listening activities to find student themes; exploration of themes through a variety of activities such as photo stories, oral histories, and language experience stories; extending literacy to action inside and outside of the classroom; and an evaluation process that includes learners reflecting on their own progress.

CONCLUSION

Whole language, learner-centered, and participatory approaches to literacy instruction are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary and share basic philosophies. All three approaches advocate that the learner should inform literacy instruction, that learners and their background knowledge and experiences should be respected and valued, and that learning activities should be relevant to learners' personal situations. The three approaches also differ. Whole language works from whole to part and emphasizes function over form; learner-centered is concerned with collaborative decision-making about the curriculum; and participatory focuses on literacy as a vehicle for personal and social change.

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ED346874 Apr 92 Whole Language in an Elementary School Library Media Center. ERIC Digest.
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse, N.Y.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

INTRODUCTION: PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

In a traditional or basic skills approach to education, learning is broken down into small pieces. Children are asked to learn these pieces and are rewarded for their behavior. Teachers diagnose what children know and then remediate by teaching them what they do not know. Social constructivism, reflected in the whole language approach, is very close to the opposite in its philosophical stance. Learning occurs through use of language and literature, not as a separate part of it. Texts are kept whole, not broken down into parts. Teachers observe and assess what children know and build upon their knowledge, designing a classroom environment and learning activities cooperatively with children so that they become internally motivated to learn. The goals of instruction are broader and address affective considerations. Whereas in a basic skills program the goal is to teach children how to read and write, the goal of a whole language curriculum is to help children become avid readers and writers, to develop a love of learning.

The change from a basic skills to a whole language approach precipitates vast changes in the school library media center. This digest will examine these changes, specifically at the elementary school level, in terms of three curricular foci: theme studies, process writing, and literature-based reading. It will also discuss the new demands placed upon the collection and the school librarian.

THEME STUDIES

Theme studies are not unlike the units of study many teachers have taught for years. The main difference is that theme studies rely upon children's literature instead of textbooks. Children explore a topic in far more detail and spend much longer on each theme than in a textbook-driven program. Children engaged in a theme study use the school media center to seek information about specific topics. They also use works of various genres to supplement their research. Fiction, for example, demonstrates attitudes and behaviors, the reasons to use the information found in nonfiction books. Poetry can provide an aesthetic dimension to the theme study topic.

Thematic studies require large numbers of trade books, which the children use with the teachers to build the content of their instructional program. Librarians must work cooperatively with teachers to assure that resources are available in the media center when needed. At certain times of the year, pulling books can be a full-time job for the media specialist.

Flexible scheduling in the school media center is also important to the success of theme studies. When the media center is available to individuals and small groups of children virtually all day, children are free to seek information when questions arise.

PROCESS WRITING

The process writing program provides another opportunity for children to turn to books (Calkins & Harwayne, 1990). When they encounter problems in their own writing, children look to published authors for solutions. For example, children might examine "real" books to see how authors introduce different characters without listing them.

The concepts of authorship and illustration are vital to an interactive view of reading and writing (Lamme, 1989a, 1989b; Lamme & Ledbetter, 1990). Indeed, as children become authors themselves, they become interested in other authors as people and writers. When a class becomes "hooked," the media center must be prepared with a good supply of books by the favorite author or illustrator. Children also want information about authors and illustrators, and the media center will need a large collection of file materials to satisfy this interest.

LITERATURE-BASED READING

Literature-based reading programs focus upon helping children become avid and reflective readers, rather than merely skilled readers (McConaghy, 1990; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Short & Pierce, 1990). Instead of being tested after reading, children share opinions about books, both orally and in writing. This change of focus draws readers to genre studies and studies of literary elements, again making demands upon the librarian and the collection. For example, children who notice a pattern in a book, such as the shift from reality to fantasy to reality in *HIGH RISE GLORIOUS SKITTLE SKAT ROARIOUS SKY PIE ANGEL FOOD CAKE* (Willard, 1990) are likely to request more books with that pattern. Librarians can help teachers use children's comments to lead them to other good books, encouraging children to read and to respond at higher levels to what they are reading.

Other activities in a literature-based reading program that call for librarian involvement include:

- Reading Workshops, where children select books based on personal interest and link their reading to prior experience. Often children keep reading logs or literature journals to record their reactions;
- Book Buddies, where experienced readers have the opportunity to read aloud and fledgling readers experience a lap reading situation; and
- Sustained Silent Reading, where children use some time every day to read books for pleasure with no interruptions and no testing at the end of the reading. Children learn how to select books they enjoy and to sustain their reading.

CHANGES IN COLLECTION USE

The programs described above create an enormous demand for books. It is not uncommon in a whole language school for teachers to check out over 100 books at a time! In addition, in many whole language schools each child leaves school every day with a book to read with his or her family. Many librarians also provide a box of books from the media center for each classroom to support buddy reading, sustained silent reading, and home reading programs. Librarians can also expect changes in circulation patterns when a school moves to whole language. To determine areas of relative over-use and under-use, librarians may want to study data from automated circulation systems.

In today's technological age, classroom teachers do not rely solely upon books for their instructional programs. Videos, cassettes, and computer programs are in high demand as well. There has been a great increase in the publication of non-print media linked to children's books. As children become more avid readers, they become increasingly interested in these media links to their reading.

CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARIAN

As noted throughout this digest, the librarian in a whole language school plays an important role in promoting reading and an appreciation of literature. He or she must know the book collection intimately. In addition, the librarian serves as: (1) a resource to students and teachers during the planning and execution of theme studies; (2) a teacher of information skills; and (3) an instructional leader. Ideally, the librarian does more consulting and less teaching than he or she would in a traditional program (Dales, 1990).

Cullinan (1989) reports that many schools have been slow to recognize the potential of the librarian in a whole language program. It is best to involve the librarian in the transition to whole language right from the start. Recent guidelines from the American Association of School Librarians (1988) promote "service at the point of need" and other key components to serving the needs of whole language teachers and students.

Often a debate arises over ownership and control of the books purchased to support whole language programs. Should new books be in classrooms where children have immediate access to them for their reading, writing and theme studies programs, or should they be in the media center and borrowed on a temporary basis by classroom teachers? A similar territorial issue arises in the ordering of new books.

Should classroom teachers be able to order books they want for their instructional program, or should all orders go through the school librarian? In many schools the monies are divided so that classroom teachers do some ordering, while the librarian, relying heavily upon teacher recommendations, orders the bulk of the books for the media center.

Since the librarian is usually the most knowledgeable person about children's literature in a school, he or she typically takes on the task of keeping teachers up-to-date in the area of children's literature (Lamme & Ledbetter, 1990). Teachers who have relied primarily upon textbooks for a number of years need models for selecting books, reading aloud, giving book talks, conducting book discussions, storytelling, and involving children with puppetry, flannelboards, and story enactment. Not only do librarians share their expertise in all of these areas, but they also learn from teachers and read books that in previous times would have been the exclusive domain of classroom teachers.

CONCLUSION

The library resources needed to run a whole language program are different and more extensive than those needed to supplement a traditional program (Lamme & Ledbetter, 1990). Because the media center is the heart of the whole language program, it needs far more funding than it did when it only served a supplementary role to classroom instruction. These changes, though sometimes stressful, are embraced by most media specialists.

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ED400530 96 Phonemic Awareness: An Important Early Step in Learning To Read. ERIC Digest.
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THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

With little or no direct instruction, almost all young children develop the ability to understand spoken language. While most kindergarten children have mastered the complexities of speech, they do not know that spoken language is made up of discrete words, which are made up of syllables, which themselves are made up of the smallest units of sound, called "phonemes." This awareness that spoken language is made up of discrete sounds appears to be a crucial factor in children learning to read.

This Digest discusses the concept of the awareness that spoken language is made up of discrete sounds, why this concept is so important to early childhood educators, its relation to the debate on the best type of reading instruction, and finally, teaching methods that may help children in developing such an awareness.

WHAT IS PHONOLOGICAL/PHONEME AWARENESS?

Stanovich (1993-94) defines "phonological awareness" as the ability to deal explicitly and segmentally with sound units smaller than the syllable. He also notes that researchers "argue intensely" about the meaning of the term and about the nature of the tasks used to measure it. Harris and Hodges (1995) present a brief essay on phonemic awareness. Another oft-cited source (Adams, 1990) uses "phonemic awareness" almost exclusively. Phonological awareness sometimes refers to an awareness that words consist of syllables, "onsets and rimes," and phonemes, and so can be considered as a broader notion than phonemic awareness. Each term is widely used and perhaps (if incorrectly) used interchangeably. In preparing this Digest, both terms were used to search the ERIC database. For the purposes of this Digest, each author's use will be followed.

Adams (1990) describes 5 levels of phonemic awareness in terms of abilities:

- *to hear rhymes and alliteration as measured by knowledge of nursery rhymes
- *to do oddity tasks (comparing and contrasting the sounds of words for rhyme and alliteration)
- *to blend and split syllables
- *to perform phonemic segmentation (such as counting out the number of phonemes in a word)
- *to perform phoneme manipulation tasks (such as adding, deleting a particular phoneme and regenerating a word from the remainder).

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Educators are always looking for valid and reliable predictors of educational achievement. One reason why educators are so interested in phonemic awareness is that research indicates that it is the best predictor of the ease of early reading acquisition (Stanovich, 1993-94), better even than IQ, vocabulary, and listening comprehension.

Phonological awareness is not only correlated with learning to read, but research indicates a stronger statement is true: phonological awareness appears to play a causal role in reading acquisition. Phonological awareness is a foundational ability underlying the learning of spelling-sound correspondences (Stanovich, 1993-94). Although phonological awareness appears to be a necessary condition for learning to read (children who do not develop phonological awareness do not go on to learn how to read), it is not a sufficient condition. Adams (1990) reviews the research that suggests that it is critical for children to be able to link phoneme awareness to a knowledge of letters.

Once beginning readers have some awareness of phonemes and their corresponding graphic representations, research has indicated that further reading instruction heightens their awareness of language, assisting then in developing the later stages of phonemic awareness mentioned above. Phonemic awareness is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of learning to read (Yopp, 1992).

Instruments to test for a child's phonemic awareness tend to be short, easy to administer, reliable, and valid. Stanovich also provides a quick (7-minute) and easy-to-administer phonological awareness test in an article in which he discusses his career as a researcher. Yopp (1995) presents a similarly brief assessment instrument and offers detailed evidence for its validity and reliability.

RELATION TO THE "GREAT READING WARS"

Phonological awareness and its role in beginning reading has the potential to confound supporters at both extremes of the whole language vs. phonics "debate" over reading instruction. Regardless of instructional technique, phonological awareness is an essential element for reading progress (Griffith and Olson, 1992). In another study, Griffith et al. (1992) found that children with high phonemic awareness outperformed those with low phonemic awareness on all literacy measures, whether they were taught using a whole language approach or traditional basal instruction. Whole language advocates need to admit that not all children develop this necessary ability simply through immersion in a print-rich environment, and that some children will need direct instruction in phonological awareness. "Phonics first" supporters (and perhaps even "phonics only" supporters) need to admit that teaching students letter-sound correspondences is meaningless if the students do not have a solid visual familiarity with the individual letters and if they do not understand that the sounds (which can be complex, shifting, and notoriously rule-breaking) paired with those letters are what make up words (Adams, 1990).

What is needed, and what many practitioners probably already actually implement, is a balanced approach to reading instruction--an approach that combines the language- and literature-rich activities associated with whole language activities aimed at enhancing meaning, understanding, and the love of language with explicit teaching of skills as needed to develop fluency associated with proficient readers. Honig (1996) offers a review of reading research supporting such a balanced approach and presents detailed guidelines on how to integrate whole language principles with the necessary foundation reading skills.

TEACHING METHODS

Research indicates that phonological awareness can be taught and that students who increased their awareness of phonemes facilitated their subsequent reading acquisition (Lundberg et al, 1988). Teachers need to be aware of instructional activities that can help their students become aware of phonemes before they receive formal reading instruction, and they need to realize that phonemic awareness will become more sophisticated as students' reading skills develop.

The following recommendations for instruction in phonemic awareness are derived from Spector (1995):

- (1) At the preschool level, engage children in activities that direct their attention to the sounds in words, such as rhyming and alliteration games.
- (2) Teach students to segment and blend.
- (3) Combine training in segmentation and blending with instruction in letter-sound relationships.
- (4) Teach segmentation and blending as complementary processes.
- (5) Systematically sequence examples when teaching segmentation and blending.
- (6) Teach for transfer to novel tasks and contexts.

Yopp (1992) offers the following general recommendations for phonemic awareness activities:

- (a) Keep a sense of playfulness and fun, avoid drill and rote memorization.

- (b) Use group settings that encourage interaction among children.
 - (c) Encourage children's curiosity about language and their experimentation with it.
 - (d) Allow for and be prepared for individual differences.
 - (e) Make >
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Transfer interrupted!

evaluative but rather fun and informal.

Spending a few minutes daily engaging preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade children in oral activities that emphasize the sounds of language may go a long way in helping them become successful readers and learners.

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Early Childhood Update - Summer/Fall 1997

Language and Literacy Development

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The following article is a summary of testimony delivered before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on July 10, 1997.

How do children learn to read?

NICHD research has found that in order for a beginning reader to learn how to connect or translate printed symbols (letters and letter patterns) into sound, the would-be reader must understand that our speech can be segmented or broken into small sounds (phoneme awareness) and that the segmented units of speech can be represented by printed forms (phonics). This understanding that written spellings systematically represent the phonemes of spoken words (termed the alphabetic principle) is absolutely necessary for the development of accurate and rapid word reading skills. The development of phoneme awareness, the development of an understanding of the alphabetic principle, and the translation of these skills to the application of phonics in reading and spelling words are non-negotiable beginning reading skills that all children must master in order to understand what they read and to learn from their reading sessions. In addition to learning how to "sound out" new and unfamiliar words, the beginning readers must eventually become proficient in reading at a fast pace larger units of print such as syllable pattern, meaningful roots, suffixes, and whole words. This pace allows for reading fluency because, as one child said, "If you don't ride fast enough, you fall off."

The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to enable children to understand what they read. Children who comprehend well seem to be able to activate their relevant background knowledge when reading. That is, they can relate what is on the page to what they already know. Good vocabularies help, as does a knack for summarizing, predicting, and clarifying what they have read. Children's ability to understand what they are reading is inextricably linked to their background knowledge. Young children who are given opportunities to learn, think, and talk about new areas of knowledge will gain much from the reading.

Why do so many children have difficulty learning to read?

In general, children who are most at-risk for reading failure are those who enter school with limited exposure to language and thus less prior knowledge of concepts related to phonemic sensitivity, letter knowledge, print awareness, the purposes of reading, and general verbal skills including vocabulary. Children raised in poverty, youngsters with limited proficiency in English, children with speech and hearing impairments, and children from homes where the parent's reading levels are low are clearly at increased risk of reading failure. Given this general background, recent research has been able to identify and replicate findings which point to at least four factors that hinder reading development among children irrespective of their environmental, socioeconomic, ethnic, and biological factors. These four factors include deficits in phoneme awareness and developing the alphabetic principle; deficits in acquiring reading comprehension strategies and applying them to the reading of text; deficits in developing and maintaining the motivation to learn to read; and limitations in effectively preparing teachers.

How can we help children learn to read?

Learning to read is a lengthy and difficult process for many children, and success in learning to read is based in large part on developing language and literacy-related skills very early in life. A massive effort needs to be undertaken to inform parents, and the educational and medical communities of the need to involve children in reading from the first days of life; to engage children in playing with language through

nursery rhymes, storybooks, and writing activities; and, as early as possible, to bring to children experiences that help them understand the purposes of reading, and the wonder and joy that can be derived from it. Parents must become intimately aware of the importance of vocabulary development and the use of verbal interactions with their youngsters to enhance grammar, syntax, and verbal reasoning.

- Young preschool children should be encouraged to learn the letters of the alphabet, to discriminate letters from one another, to print letters, and to attempt to spell words that they hear.
- Reading out loud to children is a proven activity for developing vocabulary growth and language expansion, and plays a causal role in developing both receptive and expressive language capabilities.
- Procedures with good accuracy now exist to identify children at risk of reading failure. This information needs to be widely disseminated to schools, teachers, and parents so that early identification and intervention can take place.
- Kindergarten programs should be designed so that all children will develop the prerequisite phonological, vocabulary, and early reading skills necessary for success in the first grade.
- Beginning reading programs should be constructed to ensure that adequate instructional time be allotted to the reaching of phonemic awareness skills, phonics skills, the development of spelling and orthographic skills, the development of reading fluency and automaticity, and the development of reading comprehension strategies. For children demonstrating difficulty in learning to read, it is imperative that each of these components be taught in an integrated context and that ample practice in reading familiar material be afforded.
- Strong competency-based training programs with formal board certification for teachers of reading should be developed.
- A formal procedure need to be developed to assess the current status of scientific research-based knowledge relevant to reading development, reading disorders, and the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read and to develop strategies for rapid dissemination of this information to facilitate teacher preparation and effective reading instruction in our nation's schools.

For more information please contact Reid Lyon at (301) 496-9849

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ED372375 94 Phonics in Whole Language Classrooms. ERIC Digest.
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THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

This digest discusses some of the ways children develop functional phonics knowledge in the context of authentic reading and writing, as well as some of the ways teachers can foster such development.

CHILDREN DEVELOP PHONICS KNOWLEDGE:

- * "By having familiar and favorite stories (poems, rhymes, etc.) read to them again and again, during a shared reading experience wherein they can see the text and see the teacher point to words as they are spoken. (Holdaway, 1979)." This process facilitates the learning of words and of letter/sound patterns, as well as an understanding of print and how it is read in English.
- * "By discussing letter/sound relationships in the context of authentic reading selections." Teachers can facilitate such discussion within the shared reading experience, using big books or charts that all the children can see. Alphabet books also invite the discussion of letter/sound relationships.
- * "By engaging in a limited number of activities reinforcing letter/sound relationships, as an outgrowth of the shared reading experience." For example, children might make charts of words exhibiting letter/sound patterns of particular interest to them. After two or more charts have been compiled, children could make related graphs comparing appropriate data (Whitin et al, 1990).
- * "By learning to use letter/sound cues along with prior knowledge and context." For example, proficient readers seem unconsciously to use initial letters plus prior knowledge and context to predict what a word might be, before focusing on more of the word or the following context to confirm or correct. This strategy seems to come naturally for many children, but others may need instructional assistance in first using the strategy consciously.
- * "By rereading favorite stories, songs, and poems, independently or with a peer." This independent practice contributes greatly to solidifying children's growing understanding of print. The rereading is facilitated if children have individual copies of the text, and if they can listen to a tape recording of the text as they read. It's especially helpful if the tape recording is appropriately paced (Carbo, 1989).
- * "By observing and participating as the teacher demonstrates letter/sound relationships while writing." For example, the teacher may model his/her writing process, lead the children in guided writing, and/or write something from the children's dictation.
- * "By writing independently, constructing their own spellings as best they are able." Of course, primary grade children should be writing in whatever way they can, whether it be scribble writing, random letters and symbols, or letters that at least begin to be decipherable as words. But when they can use letters to represent sounds, they begin to promote their own phonics development through writing (Temple et al, 1993).
- * "By developing their own strategies for learning letter/sound patterns." The story of Jevon in "Jevon Doesn't Sit at the Back Anymore" (White, 1990) beautifully illustrates how children may develop their own strategies that teachers are not always aware of. During Jevon's second year in her kindergarten, White noticed that Jevon was learning letter/sound relationships by observing the spellings of his classmates' names, which were written on the message board and sign-up sheets, as well as on the papers they wrote. White reports that "Long before Jevon connected sounds and symbols in inventive spelling, names made their way into his written communication" (1990, 18-19).

WAYS TEACHERS CAN HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP PHONICS KNOWLEDGE:

1. "First, have faith in children as learners." They can and usually will develop a grasp of letter/sound relationships with little direct instruction, just as they learned to talk without direct instruction in the rules of the English language. Also, don't assume that because children cannot do worksheets on particular phonics elements that they cannot read words with those same patterns (e.g. the example from Watson and Crowley, 1988, 263-265).

2. "Discuss interesting patterns of onsets and rimes, in the context of shared reading experiences." Among the stories, poems, rhymes, and songs chosen to share with children should be some that emphasize alliteration and rhyme. One of the best ways to generate children's interest in the sound elements of a selection may be to ask simply "What do you notice about this poem?" or, more specifically, "What do you notice about the sound in this poem?" (Mills et al, 1992). Though children may notice different sound elements than the teacher anticipated, this procedure gives children ownership over their own learning. Of course much of the poetry that rhymes is humorous poetry--one thinks, for example, of Shel Silverstein's poetry or Jack Prelutsky's, though humorous poetry should comprise only a modest proportion of the poetry to which children are introduced. One book particularly rich in poems with alliteration, rhyme, and onomatopoeia is "Noisy Poems," collected by Jill Bennett (Oxford University Press, 1987). A cumulative book with wonderfully alliterative and onomatopoeic verbs is "Deep Down Underground," by Olivier Dunrea (Macmillan, 1989).

3. "As an outgrowth of the shared reading experience, engage children in, and/or allow for, a limited number of activities that reinforce their natural learning of letter/sound relationships and patterns." Mathematically-related ideas can involve the making of charts that list words with particular sound patterns, and graphs based upon the charts (for example, you might chart all the "sl-" and "sp-" and "st-" words in several poems, then make a class graph showing the relative frequency of the words in each list (see Whitin et al, 1990). Children may especially enjoy collaborating in such activities--and in creating their own alphabet books, too. In "Looking Closely: Exploring the Role of Phonics in One Whole Language Classroom (Mills et al, 1992)," we see various phonics-enhancing activities that can stem from and enhance enjoyment of literature, as well as activities involving children's names.

4. "Emphasize the use of letter/sound cues along with prior knowledge and context." Teachers can do this, such as: (1) by modeling how they themselves use meaning (and grammar) along with initial letters to predict what a word might be; (2) by repeatedly encouraging children to think "what would make sense here" before trying to sound out a word, (3) by engaging together in oral cloze activities based on their shared readings ("What would fit in this sentence, 'I put c----- in the soup?'") and (4) by discussing, in literature discussion groups, how various children dealt with problem words. It is critical to help children develop and use letter/sound knowledge in the context of constructing meaning from texts.

5. "Foster the acquisition of phonics knowledge indirectly, through various means--"

--by pointing to words during shared reading experiences with big books, charts, etc.

--by providing small, multiple copies of many selections, so that children can easily reread favorite stories, songs, and poems

--by providing tapes of many selections for children to listen to, as they follow along with the written text

--by attending to letter/sound patterns while modeling the writing process, engaging children in guided writing, and writing down what children have dictated

--by encouraging children to write as best they can, and by helping them to develop phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge through invented spelling (see Freppon & Dahl, 1991)

--by encouraging children to experiment with print and solidify their understanding of letter/sound patterns in a variety of self-chosen ways.

6. "Be alert for children's idiosyncratic ways of developing phonics knowledge, and support those." Jevon's learning of letter/sound relationships through his classmates' names is but one example (White, 1990).

7. "By providing additional materials and help for individual children, as appropriate." For instance, children who seem readily to grasp the concept of letter/sound relationships might especially benefit from Dr. Seuss books that reinforce letter/sound patterns--and other children would enjoy and benefit from such books too. Children who are exceptionally slow in grasping letter/sound relationships may benefit from tutorial assistance, such as that offered in Marie Clay's Reading Recovery Program.

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January 1999

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Kozol On Kids

Writer and educator Jonathan Kozol's greatest concern has always been for the welfare of the nation's children, particularly those living amid urban poverty. His books include a National Book Award winner and a New York Times best seller. His two most recent--Amazing Grace and Savage Inequalities--were excerpted in this magazine. In a recent interview with Technos Quarterly Editor Mardell Raney, he talked about his life and work and his experience teaching the primary grades.



Read the full
interview with
Jonathan Kozol, from
Technos Quarterly,
Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall
1998.

In all, between the public schools and the years I worked in our freedom schools and street academies, I spent about 10 years as a teacher or as a head teacher. I miss those years very much. I sometimes think that if I still have a little strength left when I'm 65 or 70 and am not senile, I'd like to go back and teach kindergarten in a public school again. . . .

When I was teaching, I actually did teach phonics. With some students I always felt it was useful. But later, when I taught in a wealthy suburb, I simply read dozens and dozens of paperback novels with the children--children's literature instead of basal readers. I just worked like hell to teach the sounds of letters and the forms of syntax out of the literature itself. My God, that was hard work. I used to stay up all night trying to keep ahead of my students. I will always hate *Charlotte's Web* because I had to read it at 6 a.m. in order to keep ahead of some of the kids in my class. It wasn't until years later that I learned there's a fancy term for reading books with kids instead of basals. "Whole language" is one term they use. Labels come and go, but most of the good practices I see today are things a lot of teachers have been doing in the classroom for a century. Some of my teachers taught me that way in the 1940s when I was a little kid. It just seems to me that as educators we have to struggle on at least two levels. One is to make practical, realistic, incremental changes in the situation we're given. The other is to never forget the structural inequities that limit all our victories or make them far too rare. . . .

A lot of superintendents ask me what I'd look for if I were picking elementary school teachers. I always say that obviously we want people who can teach arithmetic and reading. We want young people who have an ability to relate to children and also a reasonable appreciation of survival needs in our society. But if I had to narrow it down to one characteristic, I would always hire teachers whom I would want to have dinner with, or a teacher I wouldn't mind getting stuck with on a long plane flight to California. I would look for people who are capable of making the world seem joyful, people who are a delight to be with, people who are contagiously amusing human beings. To me, that's more important than almost anything else. I would put the emphasis on the capability to create contagious enthusiasm for life. There are a lot of teachers like that, but not enough.

PHOTO: Jonathan Kozol
--Lonnie Harp

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Whole-Language Model Survives Despite Swing Back to Basics

By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

Mapleton, Maine

Amid the snow-soaked boots that line the hallway of Mapleton Elementary School, a student sits in a stream of warm sunlight to read a favorite book. In a classroom around the corner, pairs of 5th graders carefully select books to share with kindergartners--their reading partners. Down the hall, a 2nd grader peruses the shelves in the library--searching, in vain, the librarian says, for a book the youngster has not yet read.

And, in a 1st grade classroom, a dozen children don masks to act out a popular children's story, while classmates, eager to answer their teacher's questions about the book's characters and ideas, wave their arms in the air.

"Books fly around this school," Gail Gibson, the principal and a teacher, said in describing the enthusiasm both students and teachers here at Mapleton Elementary have for reading.

While the "whole language" approach is often blamed for youngsters' reading struggles, Ms. Gibson and her colleagues say its principles, which define reading instruction here, have spelled success for their students.

In this rural enclave, surrounded by struggling potato farms, failing timber mills, and an abandoned military base in Maine's isolated northern inland, books dominate the school day. Most of the 230 children at the school are proficient readers who regularly tackle challenging material and show their understanding of it. They are also prolific writers, spending a large chunk of each school day composing poetry, drafting stories, and writing about their lives. Students here also perform better on state tests than many of their peers in the state's wealthiest districts.

Mapleton Elementary is one of many schools in Maine that subscribe to the whole-language philosophy. There are few workbooks. The reading series the district purchased is packed away neatly in its box, its lessons used only periodically. While skills are an integral part of reading instruction, students learn word-recognition and sounding-out strategies not through phonics drills, but in the context of reading.

While Maine's isolation and rugged individualism have so far created an effective buffer from

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Defining Strategies

While most experts are now calling for teachers to use a balance of methods in teaching children to read, a debate is still under way between those who believe that early exposure to literature should be the basis of reading instruction and others who say that children first need to learn skills that help them decode print.

Literature-based: Often referred to as whole language, this method immerses children in a variety of literary activities, including reading books and writing stories. Comprehension takes priority over technical skills such as spelling. Students learn phonics, or sounding-out, skills in the context of

created an effective buffer from the back-to-basics movement that is spreading across the country, schools here are not alone in their stubborn embrace of whole-language principles. Despite claims to the contrary, whole language, while maimed, is surviving--even thriving, in some places.

reading children's literature.

Skills-based: In this method, phonics skills are taught explicitly. Children learn to master the sounds and letter-blends that make up words through drills and corresponding basal readers before shifting their focus to children's literature and comprehension.

"It really depends on what area of the country you're in or who you are talking to ... but there are still many people who believe in the whole-language philosophy," said Gerald R. Oglan, the president-elect of the Whole Language Umbrella, a subgroup of the National Council of Teachers of English. More than 1,000 individuals and dozens of Teachers Applying Whole Language--or TAWL--groups are members of the NCTE conference, according to Mr. Oglan, and some have been in existence for 20 years or more.

In classrooms from New York to North Carolina, and from Arizona to California, the beliefs about learning that have shaped the whole-language movement persist, despite aggressive efforts by state legislatures and state and local school boards to supplant literature-based method ("More States Moving To Make Phonics the Law," April 29, 1998.)

Inadequate Implementation

Regardless of any successes claimed by whole-language advocates, they cannot deny the damage suffered since the movement took hold in the 1980s.

"We are on the defensive," Mr. Oglan said, "and we're still trying to regroup."

Supporters of whole language are having to defend their approach because of declining test scores that critics link to the philosophy and the failure of many teachers to explain exactly how it translates into classroom practice. Teachers who embraced whole language, but may not have had the experience, knowledge, or resources necessary to implement it, were at a loss to explain to parents and policymakers how they teach reading skills, or why spelling is not emphasized with beginning learners, or whether research supported what they were doing. Where phonics was included in instruction, critics contend, it was not taught as explicitly as research suggests it should be.

"Whole language has gotten a bad rap in a lot of respects," and has unfairly taken the blame for poor reading achievement, said Brenda Power, an associate professor of education at the University of Maine in Orono who has helped train many teachers in improving literature-based instruction.

"But it also had a lot of problems," she acknowledged. "In many places, it was too loosey-goosey."

By that, Ms. Power explained, some teachers thought whole language meant abandoning phonics and putting learning into the hands of children with minimal supervision.

But the backlash has come primarily "from letting our enemies define us," contends Kenneth S. Goodman, a professor emeritus of language and literacy education at the University of Arizona, who is often referred to as the father of whole language.

Defining whole language as an abandonment of phonics and sensible classroom management presents a caricature of the whole-language classroom, he and advocates say.

"I consider myself a whole-language teacher, and I view my teaching as rigorous," said Regie Routman, who has championed her own brand of whole language as a teacher and author of whole-language books--including *Invitations* and *Transitions*--that have proved enormously popular among teachers.

But even Ms. Routman, along with teachers from Mapleton Elementary School and elsewhere, has started to distance herself from the label, if not from the philosophy. "One of the reasons I've moved away from the label is because people think it means no standards," Ms. Routman said.

Helping the At-Risk

For some educators, whole language has meant just the opposite. At the Manhattan New School in New York City, more than 90 percent of the 500 students--many of them immigrants and more than half of whom do not have English as their first language--are proficient in reading, as indicated by standardized achievement tests.

The Dewey Educational Center, in the center of a blighted neighborhood in Detroit, was slated for closing before administrators refocused instruction around whole language several years ago. It now attracts students from around the city. Though it has a long way to go to become a model urban school, test scores in reading and other subjects have improved significantly.

And at Borton Primary Magnet School, which serves neighborhood children and others in Tucson, Ariz., parents of the 230 students continue to choose to send their children to the whole-language school rather than those with more-traditional programs.

"Whole language has been so misrepresented ... that people think it's whole language versus phonics," said Shelley Harwayne, the principal of the Manhattan New School, which has won national recognition for the success of its reading program. "Of course we teach phonics, but that is only one of the ways children learn to read."

Critics, however, argue that phonics instruction, when taught in an explicit, systematic way, is most beneficial to young readers, especially poor and minority students who are considered most at risk of having difficulty.

Ms. Harwayne points to her students as proof that lock-step methods aren't necessary for most children. Five-year-olds will wander up to her door and ask her to review their writing. Students stuff the school's suggestion box with thoughtfully written recommendations for improving the school, and they rarely sit idly when they can be reading or writing, she said.

"They know what reading and writing are for," she continued, "and they know what it means to get lost in a good book."

All this, Ms. Harwayne says, comes from good instruction. In the best whole-language classrooms, she and other proponents say, teachers are not merely facilitators. They are skilled in regularly assessing students' skills and progress and are attentive in selecting strategies for increasing their charges' proficiency. They are knowledgeable about the latest education research and capable of studying what works in their own classrooms. And they are careful to describe for parents and administrators what goes on in their classrooms.

Even detractors of whole language agree that such practices have reaped benefits in the classroom.

"The best things about whole language are here to stay," said Marilyn J. Adams, a professor of education at Harvard University and a prominent reading researcher. "Writing has become a mainstay of the early-literacy classroom; the appreciation of the importance of interesting, good literature; [high-quality] professional development; and the collegiality among teachers took a real turn for the good with whole language."

What was a grave mistake, in Ms. Adams' opinion, was the strict disavowal of phonics by many whole-language teachers.

High Scores

Teachers here at Mapleton Elementary seem to have incorporated all those positive features. They meet regularly to discuss strategies for helping students read better, share success stories, and review relevant research. Teachers are often sent to workshops and conferences to expand their knowledge and enhance their skills.

Assessing progress is also a regular task for teachers, who write detailed evaluations of students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests in reading throughout the year.

When parents told them that proper spelling was important to them, the teachers began to research ways of incorporating more spelling instruction into the curriculum. That effort resulted in a book, *Spelling Inquiry: How One Elementary School Caught the Mnemonic Plague*, which Stenhouse Publishers, based in York, Maine, is set to release this spring.

By most accounts, Mapleton's students--among the poorest in the state, with more than 40 percent qualifying for federal programs for disadvantaged children--are beating the odds.

"Every year, I have some students who can't show me the beginning and end of a book ... or they call letters as numbers," said Diane Smith, a kindergarten teacher. "But they will crawl around at your feet when you read them stories. They've gotten excited about reading."

On the Maine Educational Assessments, given to 4th, 8th, and 11th graders in reading, mathematics, and other subjects, Mapleton Elementary students have consistently surpassed state averages. Only 6 percent of Mapleton's 4th graders failed to read at the "basic" level, while nearly half demonstrated advanced skills on last year's state test, which gauges reading comprehension. The school's score of 370 on the test, based on a 500-point scale, eclipsed the state average by 85 points.

And with the release two weeks ago of the latest state reading results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Maine again proved to be one of the top performers, as it has since 1992.

An impressive record, perhaps, but Maine has some advantages over many other states, observers say. With a homogeneous population--98 percent white--teachers here have little experience with children whose first language is not English. But Maine education officials say that poverty in many parts of the state poses its own challenges.

At Mapleton Elementary School, teachers have tried to meet those challenges head on.

"We have an eclectic reading program," Principal Gibson said, "and teachers will do whatever meets the needs of these kids."

On the Web

Learn facts about [whole language education](#) from the [Whole Language Umbrella](#).

In "See Dick Flunk," from the conservative *PolicyReview.com*, November/December 1997, the author claims "The evidence is overwhelming that kids with reading problems need phonics-based instruction. Why aren't educators getting the message?"

PHOTO: Mapleton 5th grader Luca Tenney tutors Bethany Lord, a 1st grader, in reading. Left, Jill Saucier reads over Ingrid Braley's shoulder in the reading corner at Mapleton (Maine) Elementary School, where whole language is still the preferred method of teaching reading. While phonics advocates often blame students' reading struggles on whole-language instruction, the written word is a passion at the rural Maine school. "Books fly around this school," says Principal Gail Gibson, lower left. Voscarr

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Reading and Ideology

by AFT President Albert Shanker
November 12, 1995

The recent Fairfax County, Virginia, school board elections featured a battle between right-wing and liberal candidates. According to the *Washington Post*, at least 12 of the 35 candidates favored teaching creationism in the schools. Other hotly debated issues included what to teach about homosexuality and how big a role phonics should play in reading instruction (October 21, 1995). A commentator describing the election said, What is at stake is the ability to educate our children in the values that both sides hold dear. Values? Wait a minute! What you want your children to learn about homosexuality is a matter of values--or ideology. But should science be subject to an ideological test? Or methods for teaching reading?

All of this sounds unpleasantly familiar. Once upon a time, in a country called the Soviet Union, the validity of science was decided on political grounds. Many Westerners still remember the story of a fellow named Lysenko. His theory of genetics was more consistent with Marxism than was Mendelianism, which was the scientific standard everywhere else in the world. So Lysenko and his genetics were elevated, and the others learned they had better shut up. We laughed at the Soviets for deciding science on the basis of ideology; yet we are making that mistake with education.

In the so-called Reading Wars, two groups are battling for control over how children learn to read. According to supporters of phonics, children must be taught to connect words that are part of their spoken vocabulary with the unfamiliar combinations of letters on the page, and they do this by learning how to sound out letters and letter combinations. Phonics supporters also say that youngsters need lots of practice in decoding--making the connection--until it becomes automatic. Phonics supporters are absolutely correct in these beliefs. But more extreme advocates of phonics--we might call them the phonics-only people--favor a dry and mechanistic approach to introducing children to the world of reading and writing.

Purist whole-language advocates, on the other hand, believe that reading is as natural as speaking. The best way to teach reading, they say, is to expose children to stories they will want to read, and let them figure out words from their context in the sentence or story, guessing if necessary. Sooner or later, they will get it right.

But as a group of articles in the Summer 1995 issue of *American Educator* makes clear, children learn best in a system that combines aspects of phonics *and* whole language. Researchers have exploded the whole-language contention that children learn to read as naturally as they learn to speak. (If they did, there wouldn't be any illiterate societies because there aren't any societies where people can't talk.) Some children learn without being given systematic, explicit instruction in sounding out words. Many do not--and that is where phonics comes in. However, researchers stress that, while knowing how to decode is essential, it is not enough. They agree with whole-language advocates that teachers must also expose their students to materials the youngsters are eager to read. Otherwise, youngsters may have little interest in reading, probably won't read much, and will never get enough practice to be skilled readers.

You'd think that most school districts would opt for the system good reading teachers have always used: a combination of phonics and whole language.

That hasn't happened. Instead, the teaching of reading has become an ideological football. The left wing, with its romantic ideas about how children learn, has adopted whole language as the sole path. And for the past several years, it has been tremendously popular. The right wing, on the other hand, which believes that learning doesn't have to be fun and that children need to be shaped up by discipline, has seized on phonics. As a result, parents whose only interest is in making sure their children get a good start have become frustrated and infuriated because they see that, in order to get phonics instruction, they might be forced to vote for school board candidates who favor teaching creationism and gay bashing.

But there are signs that evidence is beginning to prevail over ideology. After seven years of whole language--and plummeting reading scores--California recently decided to reintroduce phonics into its reading program. That needs to happen all over the country--in phonics-only and whole-language-only districts. We have sound research on the subject of how children learn to read. It is up to the people in central offices and school boards to make policy decisions on the basis of this research. Soviet agriculture went down the drain when ideology took over from science. We ignore that lesson at our peril.

For a copy of the Summer 1995 issue of American Educator, write to Teaching Reading, AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

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Open Court Collections for Young Scholars (OC)

Results, Case Study, Considerations

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Results

Not only is Open Court designed to reflect the research base on effective reading instruction, but it is also one of the only commercial reading and language arts programs with independent field tests demonstrating its effectiveness. Note, however, that student achievement data for this program is limited thus far to the K-2 curriculum, although preliminary indications are good for the entire program.

The most recent study, conducted by researchers at the University of Houston, looked at the effects of three programs on the reading achievement of economically disadvantaged first and second graders. The programs were Open Court, whole language (WL), and whole language plus a phonics program (WL/P). All participating teachers received 30 hours of inservice training. Open Court training was conducted by the publisher; WL/P training was conducted by research staff, some WL teachers were trained by research staff, and a control group of WL teachers were trained by regular district trainers. In spelling tests, OC students significantly outperformed both whole language groups. As measured by Woodcock-Johnson assessments, OC students significantly outscored students taught through the other instructional methods in reading and comprehension tests.⁴

A similar study, conducted in California,⁵ compared the achievement of first-grade students taught with OC's explicit phonics approach, students taught phonics implicitly in the context of the language arts program, and a control group taught using just the standard curriculum. After one year, students' reading achievement was measured using three different assessments, including the SAT and three SAT subtests. OC students outscored students in the other two groups on every measure. While the difference in scores between the two phonics approaches was not significant, OC students significantly outscored the control group on all SAT measures, with a total reading mean score slightly above the national average (52.2 percent).

A recent study on the reliability of standardized achievement measures⁶ compared the reading scores of two groups of second-grade students, one taught with Open Court, the other with a popular commercial basal series. Both sets of students were tested on nine subtests of four different standardized assessments. Although the study demonstrated an alarming variability among the assessments, the researchers also found that OC students outscored control group students on every single

measure. On six of the nine subtests, the mean score advantage of the OC students was educationally significant.⁷

Case Studies

PS 161 (Brooklyn, New York). PS 161 is a K-5 school located in the heart of Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood. It has a student population of 1,370, of whom over 90 percent are African-American and 97 percent qualify for free lunch. Once one of the district's bottom-tier schools, PS 161 started to turn around about 10 years ago, after the school decided to make reading instruction more consistent. The faculty began a schoolwide implementation of Open Court, supplemented by other literacy-related materials and activities. By 1996, 93 percent of the school's fifth graders were scoring above the state's minimum level in writing tests, slightly above the state average and 17 points above the average for schools with similar demographics. In reading assessments, 80 percent of third graders scored above the state's minimum level, compared with 47 percent in similar schools and 79 percent in all state schools. In addition, 38 percent of PS 161's third graders were found to be reading at the "mastery" level, 10 points above the statewide average.

Heights Elementary School (Laredo, Texas). Heights Elementary is a small school. Of the 210 students in grades 1-5, 98 percent are Latino, 55 are percent limited English proficient, and 70 percent qualify for free or reduced price lunch--statistics that would usually signal low achievement levels. In 1997, however, Heights Elementary was named one of the state's 12 "spotlight schools," largely on the strength of its reading scores--with over 85 percent of third and fourth graders passing statewide reading tests. Some of this success has been credited to the school's implementation of the phonics portion of Open Court, in combination with the use of another basal series and other literacy materials.

Considerations

Open Court Collections for Young Scholars strikes a workable, balanced approach to reading instruction reflecting the research base on the need for both direct instruction in basic skills and literature-based instruction that can help build background knowledge and improve student comprehension and vocabulary. The program is best known for its primary grade curriculum, incorporating explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics, which has been available for a number of years and for which convincing achievement data exists. This program extends through grade 6 to encompass instruction in challenging and engaging children's literature, including many classics as well as a large number of multicultural selections. There is less research, however, on the efficacy of this part of the program.

As with any new instructional program, teachers and paraprofessionals need adequate professional development to implement the program well. In particular, low-performing schools may find the publisher's standard one and one-half days of training are not enough to meet their needs. This is especially the case since the teachers' manuals for the beginning reading program can be difficult to follow. All schools should therefore be aware that additional assistance is available upon request, at no additional charge. For example, when several Title I schools in



Houston recently implemented Open Court as a part of a controlled study (see "Results" section), a full 30 hours of professional development was provided.

Students' achievement scores provide strong evidence that this is a highly effective program when implemented well. As such, it should be considered by any elementary school, across the demographic range, that needs to boost reading scores and student achievement levels.

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Reading: The Cornerstone of Learning

this is part of the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education "Reading to Learn/Learning to Read" initiative)

Reading: The First Chapter In Education

No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years.

The past five years have brought major breakthroughs in our knowledge of how children learn to read and why so many fail. These new insights have been translated into techniques for teaching reading to beginning readers, including the many students who would otherwise encounter difficulties in mastering this fundamental skill. Researchers have come to appreciate that early identification and treatment of such students can make all the difference. Researchers have also documented the problems -- personal, social, and educational -- that too often result when early attention and intervention do not occur.

Reading to Learn

Students who do not "learn to read" during the first three years of school experience enormous difficulty when they are subsequently asked to "read to learn." Teaching students to read by the end of third grade is the single most important task assigned to elementary schools. During the first three years of schooling, students "learn to read." That is, they develop the capacity to interpret the written symbols for the oral language that they have been hearing since birth. Starting in fourth grade, schooling takes on a very different purpose, one that in many ways is more complex and demanding of higher-order thinking skills. If efficient reading skills are not developed by this time, the English language, history, mathematics, current events, and the rich tapestries of literature and science become inaccessible.

In addition, a strong body of evidence shows that most students who fall behind in reading skills never catch up with their peers become fluent readers. They fall further and further behind in school, become frustrated, and drop out at much higher rates than their classmates. They find it difficult to obtain rewarding employment and are effectively prevented from drawing on the power of education to improve and enrich their lives. Researchers speak of this syndrome as the "Matthew Effect" -- the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Most Americans know how central reading is to education. According to a 1994 poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the American Federation of Teachers and the Chrysler Corporation, nearly 70 percent of teachers believe that reading is the "most important" skill for children to learn. Two years earlier, the same polling firm reported that 62 percent of parents believed that reading was one of the most important skills for their children to master. Both teachers and parents ranked reading as more critical than mathematics and computer skills. In other words, there is general agreement among researchers and the public that all children must learn to read early in their academic careers.

The Challenges of Illiteracy

More students fail to learn to read by the end of the third grade than many people imagine. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that all schools encounter students who fall into this category and that all schools should have plans for addressing the special needs of these students.

In its 1994 Reading Assessment, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a federally supported program that tracks the performance of American students in core academic subjects, reported that more than four out of 10 fourth-graders

(42 percent) in American schools were reading at a "below basic" level. This means that they could not understand "uncomplicated narratives and high-interest informative texts." NAEP also reported that such illiteracy persists in the higher grades. The report found that nearly one-third (31 percent) of eighth-graders and nearly one-third (30 percent) of twelfth-graders are also reading at a "below basic" level. The latter figures probably understate the problem, because many poor readers drop out of school before twelfth grade.

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions regarding how widespread students' reading problems really are. National longitudinal studies have measured the ability of children to recognize individual words in text. Their data suggest that more than one child in six (17.5 percent) will encounter a problem in learning to read during the crucial first three years of school. Further evidence comes from the sharp rise in the number of students who are diagnosed as learning disabled or are referred to special education because they cannot read at the proper grade level.

In contrast to popular belief, reading failure is not concentrated among particular types of schools or among specific groups of students. To the contrary, students who have difficulty reading represent a virtual cross-section of American children. They include rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban, and public and private school children in all sections of the country. According to the NAEP assessment, for example, nearly one-third (32 percent) of fourth graders whose parents graduated from college are reading at the "below basic" level.

In short, the failure of a substantial number of students to learn to read during the critical first three years of school is a national problem - one that confronts every community and every school in the country.

A Common Stumbling Block: Phonemic Awareness

Whatever the reason children fail to read by the end of the third grade, most non-readers share a common problem. They have not developed the capacity to recognize what reading experts call phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest units of speech - the basic building blocks of speaking and writing. The word "cat," for example, contains three phonemes - the /k/, /a/, and /t/ sounds. Phonemes are often identical to individual letters, but not always. The word "ox," for example, has two letters but three phonemes - the /o/, /k/, and /s/ sounds.

Researchers have demonstrated that accomplished readers are adept at recognizing phonemes and putting them together to construct words and phrases. They do this quickly, accurately, and automatically. The absence of this critical linguistic skill makes it difficult for children to decode and read single words, much less sentences, paragraphs, and whole stories. Teaching phonemic awareness and discrimination among phonemes is imperative for all students.

Solutions in the Classroom

Teaching beginners to read must be highly purposeful and strategic. Effective techniques have been developed for helping students, including those with learning disabilities, to develop phonological awareness, word recognition, and other advanced skills required for reading.

Phonological awareness activities build on and enhance children's experiences with written (e.g., print awareness) and spoken language (e.g., playing with words). A beginning reader with successful phonological awareness and knowledge of letters ostensibly learns how words are represented in print.

Intervention for learners who have difficulty with phonological awareness must be early, strategic, systematic, and carefully designed. It must be based on a curriculum that recognizes and balances the importance of both phonics instruction and the appreciation of meaning.

For children who have difficulty reading, effective reading instruction strategies should be used to build phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding. These strategies should be explicit, making phonemes prominent in children's attention and perception. For example, teachers can model specific sounds and in turn ask the children to produce the sounds. In addition, opportunities to engage in phonological awareness activities should be plentiful, frequent, and fun.

Instructional strategies should consider the characteristics that make a word easier or more difficult to read. These include: the number of phonemes in the word; phoneme position in words (initial sounds are easier); phonological properties of words (e.g., continuants, such as /m/, are easier than stop sounds, such as /t/); and phonological awareness dimensions, including blending sounds, segmenting words, and rhyming.

Many early readers will require greater teacher assistance and support. Using a research-based strategy known as scaffolding, teachers should provide students with lots of instructional support in the beginning stages of reading instruction, and gradually reduce the support as students learn more about reading skills. The ultimate goal is for students to read on their own without the help of a teacher.

A Balanced Approach

Unfortunately, it is not always easy for teachers to recognize students with reading difficulties. When they do, teachers sometimes find themselves caught between conflicting schools of thought about how to treat reading disabilities. One school of thought gives considerable attention to the teaching of phonics in the early stages of reading. Another school of thought emphasizes the whole language approach. Should teachers rely on phonics instruction, whole language instruction, or a combination of the two?

The U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have supported the review of hundreds of studies done in recent years on reading instruction and disabilities. This body of research suggests that the relatively recent swing away from phonics instruction to a singular whole language approach is making it more difficult to lift children with learning disabilities out of the downward learning spiral and, in fact, may impede the progress of many students in learning to read with ease.

Few dispute the value of giving children opportunities to write, surrounding children with good literature, and generally creating a rich literate environment for students. But for many children this is not enough. Such children will have continued difficulty with reading unless they master the decoding skills associated with phonics instruction.

Research makes clear that children do not learn to read the way they learn to talk. Speech is a natural human capacity, and learning to talk requires little more than exposure and opportunity. In contrast, written language is an artifact, a human invention, and reading is not a skill that can be acquired through immersion alone. Beginning readers benefit from instruction that helps them understand that the words they speak and hear can be represented by written symbols -- and that letters and the sounds associated with them, when combined and recombined, form words -- just as they benefit from experiences that make reading fun.

California's experience with a chosen reading approach is instructive. A decade ago, the state became a leader in the movement to embrace whole language instruction. However, as a result of low reading scores, a task force was formed and has recently adopted a more balanced reading approach that includes building phonological awareness along with the reading of meaningful and engaging texts.

Research indicates that reading can be taught effectively with a balanced approach that uses the best of both teaching approaches. Such an approach incorporates phonics instruction with the rich literacy environments advocated by whole language instruction.

The Learning to Read/Reading to Learn Initiative

Throughout the Learning to Read/Reading to Learn: Helping Children with Learning Disabilities to Succeed initiative, three leading researchers in the field of reading instruction, Marilyn Jager Adams, author of *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, a book supported by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI); Ed Kameenui of the University of Oregon, a researcher supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); and Reid Lyon of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have identified what they believe are the most important strategies for improving early reading instruction. These strategies are effective for virtually every child but are absolutely critical for children with learning disabilities. By evaluating the ways in which students learn to read, researchers have identified nine skills essential to the learning process. Identification of these skills will alert teachers and parents to ways in which they can help children learn to read more

efficiently.

Reading: The Key to Success

As already discussed, reading is the gateway to learning. Facility to understand and use written language has always been a prerequisite to the efficient acquisition of knowledge, and it is becoming increasingly important in today's information society. In the past, it may have been possible for persons who were illiterate to obtain a good job, support a family, and live a comfortable life, but those days are gone. Children who do not learn to read today can expect to live on the margins of society in every way. Universal literacy is the ultimate "access" issue in American education.

American schools thus face a new and monumental challenge. For the first time, educators are being asked to bring all students to a level of performance that was demanded of only a relatively few students in the past. Educational and political leaders understand this challenge, and a major effort is underway to raise the standard of teaching and learning in American schools. Improved reading instruction is crucial to this process. Attainment of the National Education Goals by the year 2000 will require enhanced reading skills in American students. Developments such as national standards in core subjects, new forms of accountability, or decentralization of school management will have few positive effects in the absence of well-conceived reading instruction.

Attaining such goals also means that ways must be found to address the learning needs of those students who, for whatever reasons, face difficulties in learning to read. Doing so is not only a matter of equity; it is also a practical necessity if the overall objectives of improving American education as a whole are to be met.

Not only are American schools facing new demands, they also are being asked to deliver more education without the addition of substantial new resources. Thus they must become more efficient. Incorporating the new knowledge we now possess about reading and how to teach it is imperative if schools are to use their resources effectively and efficiently. All students must start reading as soon as they are developmentally ready to do so, and they must build on basic reading skills as they move into higher grades. In the absence of such orderly progression, schools are put in a position of having too many children in remedial or special education programs.

Toward a Nation of Readers

We are living at a pivotal time in the history of American education. More than ever before, schools are being asked to deliver a higher level of education and to do so for all students. Meeting this challenge requires that the process of "learning to read" be securely underway for virtually all students by the end of the third grade.

No American school would knowingly withhold a vaccine from students that would prevent a childhood disease like measles. Yet this is, in effect, what is happening when it comes to the teaching of reading. Recent gains in our knowledge of the reading process have given us the tools to help the majority of students, including those with learning disabilities, to learn to read at the level required to function as effective individuals, workers, parents, and citizens in today's world. The challenge is to put this new knowledge in the hands of teachers, parents, and school administrators so that millions of American students who otherwise would fail to learn to read will gain access to this important skill.

[Back to Brochure](#)

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February 14, 1999

Reading Across America

The Cat in the Hat comes back--on a vital mission

Bob Chase
President, NEA



Last year on March 2, the late Dr. Seuss's birthday, NEA and its friends organized a nationwide read-in. We wanted to focus national attention on the joy and the importance of reading to children. **Read Across America** was born--and it succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.

Celebrities from Cal Ripken to Carly Simon, politicians from Al Gore to Newt Gingrich, and educators from parents to principals participated in the event. One million adults and 10 million kids donned red-and-white "Cat in the Hat" hats, ate green eggs and ham, and spent the day reading. It was a time of truly inspired silliness--for the serious promotion of literacy.

Now the Cat in the Hat is back. On Tuesday, March 2, NEA is again orchestrating **Read Across America**, because a crucial message bears repeating: Reading a book to a child will make a world of difference in that child's life.

An ongoing literacy campaign

Yet we want **Read Across America** to be not just a one-day celebration, but a springboard to a serious, ongoing, nationwide literacy campaign. To paraphrase a familiar adage: "Read to a child, and she'll enjoy books for a day. Teach her to read, and she'll enjoy books for a lifetime."

And that's not all.

A recent study by the National Academy of Sciences confirms that literacy is the key to academic achievement. The report, called *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, is the most thorough examination to date of what works in the teaching of reading. Among its conclusions: "Children who get off to a good start in reading rarely stumble. Those who fall behind tend to stay behind for the rest of their academic lives."

The report urges educators and communities to keep all children from falling behind--to reach them before they fail in school, before they are labeled, and before costly remedial education is necessary.

A national emergency

Tragically, almost 40 percent of American children are reading below grade level by the time they leave third grade. This is a national emergency--and we must treat it as such. Perhaps an alarm bell should go off in every mayor's office, every school superintendent's office, and every principal's office whenever a child falls behind in learning to read.

We must ensure that no child slips into the fourth grade without being

literate. How do we do this?

Knowing what works best in the classroom is a start. For years there has been a divisive and counterproductive war over how to best teach reading--through phonics or "whole language." Happily, the Academy report brings down the curtain on this ridiculous battle. It recommends a "balanced" reading program that combines both phonics and whole language--a sensible approach that many teachers have quietly used for years.

The National Research Council has also produced a version of the Academy's study--*Starting Out Right, A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. This report implies that reading instruction cannot be solely left to teachers: "In just about every school in America, some kids enter the first grade reading on a third grade level, whereas others are not able to reliably recognize all the letters of the alphabet. Teachers, most of them faced with more than 20 children, have to find ways to make sure that each child makes progress every day."

Clearly, parents must be on board as well, helping children to read at home. Ideally, adults must work together so that reading becomes like breathing to children--something they do reflexively, sustained by the entire environment.

Therefore, let's make **Read Across America** the kick-off for a year-round literacy campaign. The Cat in the Hat is not enough. The whole of Who-ville must join together and let our voices be heard in unison, reading book after book, so that, in the words of Dr. Seuss, "there will be no limit to the places our children will go." Not just on March 2, but always.

Bob Chase

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President's Viewpoint Read Across America Returns!

The dapper Cat in the Hat and the definitive National Academy of Sciences make a great team.



Last year on March 2, the late Dr. Seuss's birthday, NEA and its friends organized a national read-in. We wanted to concentrate the minds of adults on the importance and joy of reading books to small children.

We called our event Read Across America, and, frankly, it succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. More than half a million NEA members, a million other adults, and 10 million children took part.

Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, once wrote: "When I am reading a book, whether wise or silly, it seems to me to be alive and talking to me." Never before had Swift's famous words been tested on such a grand scale. Read Across America was truly a Swiftian experience.

And this year we're doing it again. Read Across America returns because really important messages bear repeating, and few messages are more important: Read a book to a child, and you'll be making a world of difference in that child's life.

What's more, we're convinced that we can use this year's Read Across America as a springboard to do something even more lasting in the cause of literacy.

Last year, with a protean boost from the wonderful Dr. Seuss, Read Across America connected public educators with people from every walk of American life. This year's celebration promises to be even bigger, better, and bolder--as you'll see on page 6.

But there's only so much we can accomplish in one day, once a

year.

We need to think beyond one day, and now is an excellent time for us to be taking the initiative in reading. The mini-war between phonics and whole language is ending. The recent release of the National Academy of Sciences report on reading brought down the curtain on this ridiculous conflict. Common sense, research, and pragmatism are winning out over ideology.

In reading the Academy's report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, I kept hearing the words of the reading teacher who has endeavored to educate me, a middle school teacher with no training in the teaching of reading.

"Bob, it's not an either-or proposition. An effective reading program integrates both whole language--literature--and phonics."

Well, after the most thorough examination to date of research about reading, a "balanced" reading program is what the Academy recommends, too.

"Research consistently shows that children who get off to a good start in reading rarely stumble," the Academy report notes. "Those who fall behind tend to stay behind for the rest of their academic lives."

We already know that some children are far more likely than others to have difficulties learning to read. Let's be prepared, the Academy urges, to get these children the help they need--before they fail in school, before they are labeled, and before costly remediation is necessary.

I also recommend to you the National Research Council's somewhat more user-friendly spin-off of the Academy's report, *Starting Out Right, A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*.

Starting Out Right emphasizes the complex nature of teaching reading: "In just about every school in America, some kids enter the first grade reading on a third grade level, whereas others are not able to reliably recognize all the letters of the alphabet. Teachers, most of them faced with more than 20 children, have to find ways to make sure that each child makes progress every day."

In other words, the teaching of reading is, in fact, rocket science.

Since every child should be reading at grade level by the beginning of the fourth grade--and about 40 percent are not--the challenge for America's professional educators is clear: What can we do to help every child become a skilled and enthusiastic reader?

If you have suggestions, send them to our NEA reading initiative coordinator Barbara Yentzer at byentzer@nea.org.

The historian Edward Gibbon once said that an "early and invincible love of reading" was worth more to him than all the treasures of India. A nation of invincible young readers--now there's a goal worth striving for.

Comments? You can E-mail me directly at BobChase@nea.org.

For copies of Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children and Starting Out Right, contact National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20005, 800/624-6242.

On the Web: www.nap.edu.

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Cover Story Get Ready...

...To improve reading instruction--and get results.



When Barbara Stadtmiller volunteered four years ago to try new methods of teaching reading with her first graders, she did so with a mix of excitement and trepidation. Today, Stadtmiller is all smiles, as she crows about how well her students are doing.

"I volunteered to be on a districtwide reading assessment committee because I really wanted to see changes for these students," says Stadtmiller, an NEA member who teaches at Tyler Elementary School in Livonia, Michigan.

"There was always a group of kids in my classroom who never got fully involved in the reading process. They sat back and let other kids do the work.

"But now *all* of my students get involved in reading," she continues. "They read more difficult material and take on reading challenges."

Livonia students have indeed become better readers, since the district asked teachers to look for new tools that could ratchet up reading performance.

Across the country, NEA members are taking advantage of a wealth of new research on the best techniques for teaching reading (see page 6). In Livonia, the results have been impressive:

- Almost 90 percent of kindergartners recognize letters, know letter sounds, and understand how a book works.

- The district reports a 30 percent increase in the number of kids performing at high reading levels by the end of first grade.
- And 86 percent of second graders achieved the district benchmark, which requires them to read at beginning third grade levels.

Maureen Castiglione, a fourth grade teacher at Hayes Elementary School, says, "If my students see a word they don't know, they now ask a peer, ask the teacher, or look it up. Before they would just read and blow right by those words, not knowing what they meant. Now they have a system for comprehending what they have read, which adds to their understanding."



Teacher Maureen Castiglione is proud of the gains students like Joey Coyne (above left) have made in reading

What made the difference?

"We researched the most up-to-date material on reading and borrowed the best practices from different approaches," says Stadtmiller.

Livonia's teachers use a variety of strategies for deciphering letter sounds and words, along with techniques designed to boost comprehension.

For example, Castiglione's fourth graders use a four-step process of metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension. They predict what the story will be about, clarify words as they read, summarize and re-tell the story to demonstrate understanding, and pose questions afterwards.

Kindergarten teachers get the process going by teaching students how a book works, letter recognition, and phonemic awareness. By first and second grade, students are learning how to use cues, including pictures, to decipher meaning. And from second through sixth grade, students learn how to understand expository text.

Another successful strategy involves finding out what students know as early as possible in the school year.

In the past, all first graders began the school year in the same reading group and were assessed as the year progressed, according to Stadtmiller.

"Now," she says, "we assess first graders before school starts in the fall. Then we put them in guided reading groups based on their skill level, so students with higher level reading skills can continue their advanced work, while students who need assistance are identified early on.

"The whole class works on comprehension skills," Stadtmiller continues, "but the small guided reading groups are where students learn to use phonics and decipher pictures."

There's an assessment piece as well. Greg DeNio, a fourth grade teacher at Roosevelt Elementary, is one of several educators helping to design ways of assessing reading comprehension in the fourth grade.

"Before," DeNio says, "we assessed how kids understood vocabulary, but not their level of understanding. Now, students use graphic organizers and questions to re-tell what they've read and to explain their understanding of setting, character, events, themes, problems, and solutions."

Livonia educators hope to repeat this success in the middle and high school grades. Teachers on those levels are now exploring how reading research and assessment strategies can be used to improve reading in the upper grades, says Marlene Bihlmeyer, Livonia's curriculum director.

"Our teachers are making dramatic changes in their classrooms to the benefit of their students," says Karen Zyczynski, president of the Livonia Education Association.

"We've not only set higher standards for our students, but for ourselves as well."

--Karen Gutloff

...To get kids excited about reading.

Last March, 800,000 NEA members, a million other adults, and 10 million children participated in the nation's largest literacy event ever--NEA's Read Across America.

Read Across America returns this March 2. The goal: to celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday by getting kids excited about reading.

More than just a one-day party, the event's festivities encourage kids to read more year-round. As researchers have shown again and again, the more kids read, the better they'll do.

This year's Read Across America promises to be a bigger, bolder, better kickoff to another year of reading. If you're planning to join in, here are five tried-and-true suggestions for turning up the heat.

Get Your Community Involved



In Manville, New Jersey, educators last year joined more than 1,000 children, parents, and community leaders for a slumber reading party at the town library.

In Seattle, Washington, the mayor, school superintendent, the governor's wife, and

Seattle Super Sonics basketball players gathered with teachers at the Paramount Theater, distributed books and cake to thousands of local school children, then joined in a choral reading of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* In Cambridge, Massachusetts, teachers took kids to the local firehouse to read with firefighters.

Hold a Contest

The principal of Alexander Elementary school in Jackson, Tennessee, is promising to eat worms if his students earn 7,000 reading points by between January 1 and March 2.



Students in Utah receive a stamped card for every book they read. The cards are redeemed for free soft drinks at local stores. Last year, the students read 30,000 books.

Invite Celebrities To Join In



Baltimore Orioles baseball player Cal Ripken scored big when he read Dr. Seuss books to dozens of kids during spring training last March in Florida. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited a Maryland book store to read with students.

NBC weatherman Al Roker spent time reading with students in Hoboken, New Jersey, while singer Carly Simon delighted preschoolers and adults at the Manhattan Children's Museum in New York City.

Pair Students with Reading Buddies

High school students in Cherry Creek, Colorado, last year recorded audiotapes of stories for first graders and distributed books to the youngsters.



Football players from Iowa State University read with thousands of elementary students over the state's fiberoptics network.

Put on a Show



In Paris, Illinois, children and teachers last March dressed as their favorite Seuss characters and paraded around town.

Alexandria, Virginia, students in grades pre-K through three, wore ethnic dress and costumes as they read with foreign embassy representatives at a local shopping mall.

NEA's Reading Initiative

This year, NEA is taking Read Across America one step further with a high-profile initiative that aims to have every child reading effectively by third grade. (For details, see [President's Viewpoint](#))

As part of this initiative, NEA will be working with state and

local affiliates to provide classroom teachers and school support staff with the tools they need to turn reading research into action.

Throughout the coming year, this activity will include sharing model reading programs and strategies and engaging parents and community partners in school reading efforts.

If your school staff or Association has a model reading program to share, let NEA know. Contact B.J. Yentzer at byentzer@nea.org. Or post your ideas on the *NEA Today* Web site at www.nea.org/neaoday.

Look to future issues of *NEA Today* for more about NEA's reading initiative and Read Across America.

Reading Research Ready To Go

Two new reports from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences offer the latest research on how to turn children into effective readers: Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, and a companion guide for parents and educators, Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success.

Catherine Snow, professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, chaired the committee that produced the reports. She spoke recently with NEA Today's Karen Gutloff about the findings.



What's the most significant conclusion you've reached?

That preventing reading difficulties starts at birth and is crucial during the preschool years.

We need environments where children have adequate health care, warm and loving parental care. It's important that oral language skills and an enthusiasm for reading are encouraged at home and in preschool. Another preventive method is having excellent reading instruction in school.

We tend to associate reading difficulties with kids from certain kinds of families, as though it's a disease that only certain kids get. It's not a disease. Reading difficulty is a likely part of growing up if kids don't have access to excellent instruction.

How should educators begin to improve reading instruction?

Starting Out Right takes the best research we found about what works and translates it into specific activities for parents and educators.

The book lays out activities you can use to improve reading with your four-year-old or with a class of six-year-olds. It's all

research-based.

Educators should use the suggested activities as a basis for comparison with what they're doing in the classroom now. After reading the book they should ask, "Does my classroom replicate these recommendations?"

Should schools of education change the way they train teachers to teach reading?

Yes. Schools of education need to recognize that the breadth of knowledge required to be an effective teacher of reading can't be acquired through one or two courses on reading pedagogy.

Pre-service teachers need courses on linguistics and language structure, and they need to know how to apply what they learn to individual children. We don't expect doctors to practice without understanding the intricacies of organic chemistry. Teachers should be taught how language works.

Is the phonics vs. whole language war over?

I sure hope so. I think people are really sick of the level of controversy about that. We now know what works. The best educators have been just closing their doors and doing what they know needs to be done. They analyze the needs of individual children and tailor their instruction to meet those needs.

Now that we have solid research, what happens next?

I hope schools will use the research to create coherence in how students are taught to read. Too often, one teacher is doing one thing, while a colleague next door has a different approach. Kids need consistency. The reading specialist, ESL teachers, tutor, and teacher's aide need to get in a room together and talk to see how they can use the same methods of enforcing reading skills.

Are kids spending enough time reading?

Having kids read a lot is one of the crucial components of becoming a good reader. Young readers need to become practiced at recognizing letters and sounds. The only way to get good at it is to practice.

The more kids read, the better they'll do at it. That's why NEA's Read Across America program is a great step in the right direction.

Checklist

The Cat Is Back!

Read Across America returns March 2, 1999. To get every child in every school in every community to celebrate reading in honor of Dr. Seuss's 95th birthday:

- Call your NEA local affiliate. See what's being planned, and, if nothing's in the works, gather some colleagues,

brainstorm, and make something happen.

- Get to the Read Across America Web site: www.nea.org/readacross. Check highlights from celebrations around the country last year to get great ideas for this year.
- Re-read page 5 for good ideas about Read Across America activities you can try in your community. Think about posting that page on your school's bulletin board to inspire your colleagues.
- Engage partners. The PTA, American Library Association, Boys & Girls Clubs, bookstores, newspapers, local reading councils, and many, many other groups are eager to participate.
- Sign the Read Across America pledge at www.nea.org/readacross and describe what you'll be doing.
- To get more information, visit www.nea.org/readacross. Call NEA's Fax-on-Demand service at 888/2GETNEA. Or call 202/822-SEUS.

Resources

- NEA has joined with Scholastic to help new teachers build effective classroom libraries. For just \$19.95, new NEA members can receive 25 grade-appropriate paperback books, an accompanying literature guide, and the just-revised reference for new faculty, *Learning to Teach*.

For details, call NEA's Fax-on-Demand service at 888/2GETNEA (that's 888--not 800--243-8632) for document 320, New Member Special Offers. To order the package directly, call 1-800/SCHOLASTIC. Choose "prompt 8 for assistance."

- *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. The country's leading experts from the National Academy of Sciences offer their findings on factors that put children at risk for poor reading. This comprehensive new report discusses effective reading instruction techniques for kids in the preschool and early grades, and offers recommendations on how literacy can be fostered from birth through the primary grades. National Academy Press, \$39.95. Call 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu.
- *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Success in Reading*. This book takes the National Academy of Sciences recommendations from *Preventing Reading Difficulties* and boils them down into layman's

terms for parents and educators.

Book chapters discuss how to get kids prepared to learn how to read in school, effective classroom instruction in kindergarten and the early grades, and ways school administrators and policy makers can help prevent reading difficulties in young children.

National Academy Press, \$14.95. Call 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu.

- *Every Child Reading: An Action Plan* is a booklet published by the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of 12 of the country's leading education organizations, including NEA.

The booklet outlines practices educators, policy makers, and others should adopt to fall in line with research on how to teach reading effectively. For copies, contact Lydia Ellis at the American Federation of Teachers, 202/393-5684. On the Web: www.learningfirst.org.

- The American Library Association Web site--www.ala.org--offers tips on how librarians and parents can encourage teenagers to read.
- The International Reading Association offers educators a wealth of information on reading and literacy--from books to conferences. Contact IRA at 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE, 19714-8139. On the Web: www.reading.org.

nea | 1201 16TH STREET, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
202.833.4000



One America

Promising Practices

The President's Initiative on Race

Program:	Multicultural Music Group Inc. , New York, NY
Contact(s):	Luis Mojica, Executive Director: (914) 375-4096
Purpose:	To promote multicultural arts instruction as a tool to achieve global understanding, cultural awareness, and academic improvement

Background

Program Operations

Outcomes

Background

The Multicultural Music Group Inc. (MMG) is a nonprofit organization created in 1996 to incorporate multicultural instruction in classrooms. As a result of the absence of multicultural topics in the teachers' training curricula for arts education, MMG has been adopted by several schools and community school districts in New York City.

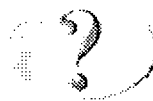
Program Operations

Through its programs, MMG strives to increase students' arts and academic proficiency in the New York City public schools, as well as to increase the amount of teacher training programs in multicultural instruction. The program also seeks to heighten the aesthetic sensitivity for multicultural arts and decrease the racial tensions among ethnic groups in New York City schools and their surrounding communities. Through the Teacher Training Program, the MMG contacts schools in multiethnic communities and provides a summer institute in multicultural student education for their music teachers. The teaching approach reinforced through another program, the Integrated Arts Component, presents the arts as a vehicle to illuminate concepts from other disciplines such as language, grammar, reading and phonics. This program strives to use multicultural artistic concepts to enhance the academic achievement of students from kindergarten-12th grade. The Residence Program presents the opportunity for musicians from different cultures to work with educational institutions as artists in residence who teach music educators and their students how to create and perform the music of their expertise.

Outcomes and Significant Accomplishments

During the past three years, the MMG has annually supported an average of 25 music educators and their approximately 600 respective students to develop multicultural repertoires and with the cooperation of artists from the Residence Program. Through the work of MMG, two schools in New York were removed from a list of schools under review for having low-reading levels. This accomplishment helped the MMG expand the Integrated Arts Component to other schools and districts in New York City.

Back to One America



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1999 White House Education Press Releases and Statements

(3) weeding
conduct
reading
classroom

February 20, 1999

**PRESIDENT CLINTON'S RADIO ADDRESS: BUILDING ON WHAT WORKS
TO IMPROVE EDUCATION**

10:06 AM EST

Today, in his radio address, President Clinton will reiterate his call for education accountability measures that build on the success of state reforms, and ask Congress to pass his broad education agenda to give states the tools they need to give all children a world-class education.

Education Accountability Measures That Build on What Works. In his State of the Union Address, President Clinton announced a package of accountability measures designed to hold students, teachers, and schools to high standards, and to ensure that school districts and states provide students with a high quality education. In his radio address, the President again will call for ending social promotion; making sure teachers are qualified; getting states to turn around low-performing schools; providing parents with school report cards; and instituting effective discipline policies as requirements of receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The President applauded efforts that states and school districts are making, under the leadership of committed governors, in the states of North Carolina, Michigan, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and California to implement these common-sense principles. In those states and others, these accountability measures are producing results. President Clinton wants to build on those efforts and ensure that all children reap the rewards of strengthened accountability.

Strengthened Investments in Education for the 21st Century. The President's effort to support high academic standards for all children includes an unprecedented commitment of national resources to help states and local districts improve education. Students and teachers cannot reach for excellence in outdated, falling down, overcrowded classrooms. President Clinton's balanced budget calls for continued strengthened investments in education: hire 100,000 teachers over seven years so as to reduce class size in grades 1-3 to a nationwide average of 18 students; build, repair, or modernize up to 6,000 schools through \$25 billion in bonds; triple funding to expand after-school activities and provide intensive help to students to meet high standards; raise the quality of teaching; improve literacy; enhance technology in the schools; recruit outstanding teachers to underserved high-poverty rural areas and inner cities; and provide new pathways to college for disadvantaged students. The FY 2000 budget includes \$1.4 billion to hire 38,000 new teachers by the end of the second year of the program. The President challenged Congress to fund his education agenda and help states and districts provide all children with a first-class education in the 21st century.

Release of State-By-State Class Size and School Modernization Funding. Today, the Education Department released data that shows how much each state would receive under President Clinton's FY 2000 budget request to reduce class size and modernize schools. For example, in FY 2000, California would receive funds to support 4,386 new teachers and federal tax credits to pay the interest on \$3 billion of school modernization bonds; Illinois would receive funds to support a total of 1,522 new teachers and federal tax credits to pay the interest on \$1.1 billion of school modernization bonds; and Florida would receive funds to support 1,749 new teachers and federal tax credits to pay the interest on \$1.3 billion of school modernization bonds.

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ED HOME

Reading Summit - September 18-19, 1998



The America Reads Challenge is a grassroots call to action by President Clinton. This unprecedented national campaign challenges *every* American to help all our children learn to read, including those with disabilities and limited English proficiency. The Challenge touches citizens from all walks of life and sparks collaborations between educators, parents, librarians, business people, senior citizens, college students, and community and religious groups.

The America Reads Challenge:

- **Motivates parents** as their child's first teacher to foster a love of reading at home.
- **Recruits colleges** to enlist students to tutor children in their work-study job.
- **Encourages teachers** to utilize best practices and professional development in reading.
- **Mobilizes volunteers** to give students extra help after school and during the summer.
- **Engages businesses** to involve employees and offer incentives to young readers.
- **Unites communities** to form strong partnerships to promote child literacy.

Americans are responding to the Challenge with tremendous enthusiasm. Activities include:

- **1000 colleges and universities** have joined America Reads by directing Federal Work-Study students to tutor children in reading. Work-study tutors may also assist in family literacy programs nationwide.
- **Thousands of America Reads tutors** serve their communities through AmeriCorps, VISTA, National Senior Service Corps, and Learn & Serve America.
- **Pediatricians along with volunteers** in their offices are reading to children, advising parents on literacy and giving away free books to children as part of their check-ups.
- **Hundreds of communities** have come together to recruit volunteer reading partners, organize book drives and support schools in helping children learn to read.
- **More than 250 organizations** -- religious groups, businesses, schools, literacy groups, libraries, museums, media outlets, children's, parents' and teacher organizations -- have joined the **President's Coalition for The America Reads Challenge**.

Information is available on the web at: www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads.

Or for resources and ideas on what you can do to help children learn to read, call

1-800-USA-LEARN

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Reading Excellence Program

U.S. Department of Education Announces:

The Reading Excellence Program

What is the Reading Excellence Program?

The Reading Excellence Program, a \$260 million federal grant program, will competitively award grants to States to improve reading.

The Reading Excellence Program is designed to:

- provide children with the readiness skills and support they need in early childhood to learn to read once they enter school;
- teach every child to read by the end of the third grade; and
- use research-based methods to improve the instructional practices of teachers and other instructional staff.

What are the primary activities supported?

- Professional Development
- Transition programs for kindergartners
- Family Literacy
- Tutoring

Who can participate?

The Reading Excellence Program requires broad-based partnerships that include, but are not limited to parents, teachers, family literacy providers, volunteer organizations, libraries, colleges and universities, businesses, child-care providers, and professional development providers.

How are grants awarded?

Grants will be competitively awarded to States that have established state-wide reading partnerships. The State Educational Agencies will then run two grant competitions:

- **Local Reading Improvement Grants**

- Eligible applicants include:
 - local school districts that have at least one school in Title I school improvement status;
 - districts with the highest or second highest percentages of poverty in the State; and
 - districts with the highest or second highest number of poor children in the State.

- **Tutorial Assistance Grants**

- Eligible applicants include:
 - local school districts that have at least one school in Title I school improvement status;
 - districts with the highest or second highest percentages of poverty in the State;
 - districts with the highest or second highest number of poor children in the State; and
 - districts that are located in an empowerment zone or enterprise community.

For more information, please call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Applications Available: March 1999

Application Deadline: May 7, 1999

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Reading Excellence Program

The Reading Excellence Act

FAQ Page

Overall Purpose

1. What is the purpose of the Reading Excellence Act?

The Reading Excellence Act amends Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 by adding a reading component to:

- provide children with the readiness skills and support they need in early childhood to learn to read once they enter school;
- teach every child to read by the end of the third grade;
- improve the instructional practices of teachers and other instructional staff in elementary schools; and,
- provide additional support for students having difficulty making the transition from kindergarten to grade 1, particularly students experiencing difficulty with reading skills.

The Reading Excellence Act supports four primary activities: (1) professional development; (2) out-of-school tutoring; (3) family literacy; and (4) transitional programs for kindergarten students.

2. How much money was appropriated for REA?

In FY 1999, \$260 million was appropriated for the Reading Excellence Act. This includes \$10 million for Even Start Statewide family literacy initiative grants, \$3.9 million for national evaluation activities, \$5 million for National Institute for Literacy dissemination, and \$241.1 million for Reading Excellence Act grants to States.

3. How will the Reading Excellence Act grants work?

Under the Act, the Secretary of Education is authorized to make competitive grants to State Educational Agencies (SEAs). All States are eligible to apply. A SEA may not receive more than one grant.

State Educational Agencies that receive funding are required to make subgrants under two separate parts of the program, Local Reading Improvement and Tutorial Assistance.

- Local Reading Improvement subgrants are awarded on a competitive basis to: (1) local districts that have at least one school in Title I school improvement status; (2) districts with the highest or second highest percentages of poverty in the States; or (3) districts with the highest or second highest number of poor children in the State.
- SEAs must use at least 85 percent of their awards to make local reading improvement grants to school districts to: (1) provide professional development for teachers based on the best research in practice; (2) operate tutoring programs after school, before school, during non-instructional periods during the school day, on weekends and during the summer; and (3) provide family literacy services by forming partnerships with community-based organizations, public libraries, colleges and universities, and other organizations to improve the teaching of reading and the reading achievement of children and their families.

4. What does REA mean for the America Reads Challenge (ARC) office? Will the ARC move to OESE?

The America Reads Challenge (ARC) office will remain in the Secretary's office at the U.S. Department of Education. The goal and mission of America Reads remains the same and that is that all children will read independently and well by the end of the third grade. The Reading Excellence Act supports this goal. Although the Reading Excellence Act program will be housed in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, both offices will be integrally involved in the implementation of the REA. Additionally, the America Reads Challenge office will continue to operate as it has been in addressing the numerous strategies for meeting the goal and mission of the Challenge.

5. Why is REA needed?

Unfortunately, too many children fail to read at grade level. In 1994, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress, 40 percent of our nation's fourth graders failed to read at the basic level. Sixty-nine percent of African American and 64 percent of Hispanic American fourth graders read below the basic level.

We know that to succeed in school, be prepared for more advanced courses in college, and participate in the high-skill workplace of the 21st century all students need good reading skills. The Reading Excellence Act targets the children who are most in need of additional assistance at the most critical period, the primary grades. Research shows that students who are behind in reading can catch up to grade level with additional reading instruction.

###



The Reading Excellence Act: Application Process



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Reading Excellence Program

The Reading Excellence Act

FAQ Page

Targeting

14. Who does the REA target?

The REA targets the neediest children:

- local school districts that have at least one school in Title I school improvement status;
- districts with the highest or second highest percentages of poverty the State; or
- districts with the highest or second highest number of poor children in the State.

15. How will REA help teachers?

LEAs that receive subgrants shall include an assurance that they will carry out professional development for the classroom teacher and other instructional staff on the teaching of reading based on scientifically based reading research.

16. How will REA use volunteers?

LEAs that receive subgrants shall include an assurance that they will use supervised individuals (including tutors), who have been appropriately trained using scientifically based reading research, to provide additional support, before school, after school, on weekends, during non-instruction periods of the school day, or during the summer.

17. Will REA support family literacy?

Yes. LEAs shall include an assurance that they will provide family literacy services based on programs such as the Even Start family literacy model enable parents to be their child's first and most important teacher.

Under the REA, "family literacy services" means, "services provided to participants on a voluntary basis that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family and that integrate all of the following activities: (a) interactive literacy activities between parents and their children; (b) training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partner in the education of their children; (c) parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and (d) an age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences."

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[The Reading Excellence Act: Tutorial Assistance Grants](#)



[The Reading Excellence Act: Evaluation](#)



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Reading Excellence Program

The Reading Excellence Act

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This page last modified May 27, 1999. (lvb)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release

January 24, 1999

VICE PRESIDENT GORE ANNOUNCES ADMINISTRATION WILL SEEK \$128 MILLION INCREASE IN FUNDS TO IMPROVE EARLY READING

Washington, DC -- Vice President Gore announced today that the Administration will seek an additional \$128 million in the FY2000 budget to help children learn to read well.

This proposal, including an increase of \$26 million for the Reading Excellence Act and \$50 million for a new initiative to identify and address reading problems in young children, will help schools and communities respond to the President's challenge that every child should be able to read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

"In an economy increasingly powered by information and technology, reading and the ability to learn are strategic skills," Vice President Gore said. "We must help all of our children master the basics and learn to read well in order to help them succeed in the 21st century."

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 60 percent of 4th graders read at the basic level or higher. Research shows that students who fail to read well by the 4th grade are at greater risk of educational failure and that good reading skills provide an important foundation for subsequent learning and success. In order to address this need, the Clinton Administration launched the "America Reads" challenge and worked with Congress to pass the Reading Excellence Act last year to help more than 500,000 children in pre-kindergarten through third grade learn to read through expanded teacher training, family literacy programs, tutoring and other efforts.

To expand on these efforts, the Vice President announced today that the Administration will propose:

- A \$26 million increase in the Reading Excellence Act to help an additional 50,000 children learn to read through expanded teacher training, family literacy programs, tutoring, and other efforts.
- An increase of \$10 million for the Even Start Family Literacy Program to support family-centered education projects helping parents learn literacy and parenting skills while supporting early childhood education for young children.
- \$50 million for a new school-based primary education intervention program to identify and address reading problems for children aged 5-9. While research demonstrates the effectiveness of early interventions to address reading problems and learning disabilities, 60% of children eventually placed in special education are identified too late to receive the full benefit from such interventions. This initiative will help schools develop and implement research-based strategies to identify and address reading problems in the early grades to reach children earlier and give them the extra help they need to become good readers.
- A \$7 million increase for initiatives to improve writing and reading skills, including an expansion of the National Writing Project and the creation of a new competitive grant program to develop and evaluate models of effective writing instruction. Improved writing skills provide an essential foundation for literacy and reading, and this proposal would double the level of funding for these initiatives.

- \$35 million for new research on early childhood and early elementary reading, professional development for reading instruction, English language acquisition for limited English proficient children, and improvements in literacy for older children.

Moreover, President Clinton and Vice President Gore have recently announced other major increased investments to help students learn to read and do well academically. They recently announced a proposed increase of \$400 million for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to provide after-school and summer school programs for more than a million students around the nation. In awarding these funds, the Education Department will give priority to school districts that end social promotion by requiring that students meet academic standards in order to move to the next grade -- but use these funds to give students extra help after-school and in the summer to help them succeed.

The Vice President also recently announced a \$320 million proposed increase for Title I -- the largest federal elementary and secondary education program -- to help disadvantaged students master the basics like reading and reach high academic standards. \$200 million of this increase would be used by states to identify and intervene in low-performing schools.

END

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Last Updated -- February 4, 1999, (jls)



Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children

10 Research-Based Principles

1. Home language and literacy experiences that lead to the development of key print concepts are plentiful among children who enter school prepared to learn to read. Joint book reading with family members helps children develop a wide range of knowledge that supports them in school-based reading. Once students are in school, parental help in the form of modeling good reading habits and monitoring homework and television viewing is associated with gains in student achievement. Programs that assist families in initiating and sustaining these sorts of activities show positive benefits for children's reading achievement.

2. Preschool programs are particularly beneficial for children who do not experience informal learning opportunities in their homes. These preschool experiences include opportunities to listen to and examine books, say nursery rhymes, write messages, and see and talk about print. Such preschool experiences lead to improved reading achievement in the school years, with some effects proving durable through grade 3.

3. Skills that predict later reading success can be promoted through a variety of classroom language and meaningful reading and writing events in kindergarten and grade 1. The two most powerful of these predictors are letter-name knowledge and phonemic awareness (the conscious awareness of the sounds in *spoken* words). Instruction that promotes phonemic awareness engages children in hearing and blending sounds. Activities that promote this attention to sounds can be motivating and playful for young children, including oral renditions of rhymes, poems, and songs, as well as writing their own journals and messages. Such instruction has demonstrated positive effects on primary-grade reading achievement, especially when it is coupled with letter-sound instruction.

4. Primary-level instruction that supports successful reading acquisition is consistent, well-designed, and focused. Teachers lead lessons where children receive systematic word recognition instruction on common, consistent letter-sound relationships and important but often unpredictable high-frequency words, such as *the* and *what*. Teachers ensure that children become adept at monitoring the accuracy of their reading as well their understanding of texts through instruction in strategies such as predicting, inferencing, clarifying misunderstandings, and summarizing. Instructional activities that promote growth in word recognition and comprehension include repeated reading of text, guided reading and writing, strategy lessons, reading aloud with feedback, and conversations about texts children have read.

5. Primary-level classroom environments in successful schools provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in teacher-guided instruction to everyday reading and writing. In these classrooms, teachers read books aloud and hold follow-up discussions, children read independently every day, and children write stories and keep journals. These events are monitored frequently by teachers, ensuring that time is well spent and that children receive feedback on their efforts. Teachers design these events carefully, using information from ongoing assessment of children's strengths and needs as the primary basis for new activities.

6. Cultural and linguistic diversity among America's children reflects the variations within the communities and homes in which they live and is manifest in differences in their dispositions toward and knowledge about topics, language, and literacy. Effective instruction includes assessment, integration, and extension of relevant background knowledge and the use of texts that recognize these diverse backgrounds. The language of children's homes is especially critical for schools to build on when children are learning to speak, listen to, write, and read English. There is considerable evidence that the linguistic and orthographic knowledge students acquire in speaking and reading their first language predicts and transfers to learning to read a second language. When teachers capitalize on the advantages of bilingualism or biliteracy, second language reading acquisition is significantly enhanced.

7. Children who are identified as having reading disabilities benefit from systematic instruction, but not at the cost of opportunities to engage in meaningful reading and writing. These children profit from the same sort of well-balanced instructional programs that benefit all children who are learning to read and write. Programs are characterized by intensive one-on-one or small-group instruction, attention to both comprehension and word recognition processes, thoroughly individualized assessment and instructional planning, and extensive experiences with an array of texts.

8. Proficient reading in third grade and above is sustained and enhanced by programs that adhere to four fundamental features: (1) deep and wide opportunities to read, (2) the acquisition of new knowledge and vocabulary, partially through wide reading but also through explicit attention to acquiring networks of new concepts through instruction, (3) an emphasis on the influence that the kinds of text (e.g., stories versus essays) and the ways writers organize particular texts has on understanding, and (4) explicit attention to assisting students in reasoning about text.

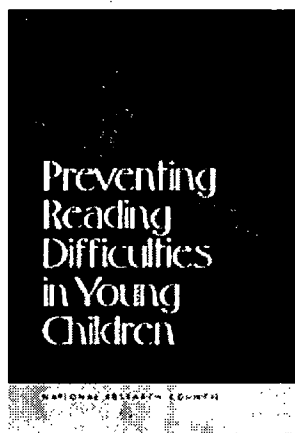
9. Professional opportunities to improve reading achievement are prominent in successful schools and programs. These opportunities allow teachers and administrators to analyze instruction, assessment, and achievement, to set goals for improvement, to learn about effective practices, and to participate in on-going communities in which participants deliberately try to understand both successes and persistent problems.

10. Entire school staffs, not just first-grade teachers, are involved in bringing children to high levels of achievement. In successful schools, goals for reading achievement are clearly stated, high expectations for children's attainment of these goals are shared with all participants, instructional means for attaining these goals are articulated, and shared assessments are used to monitor children's progress. Instructional programs in successful schools may have many different components, including a range of materials and technology, but they maintain a focus on reading and writing. Successful programs extend into the home by involving parents in their children's reading and homework. Community partnerships, including volunteer tutoring programs, are common in such schools.

The work reported herein was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment or the National Institute on Early Childhood Development, or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.

SEE ALSO:

References for CIERA 10 Principles



Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, Editors

Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council

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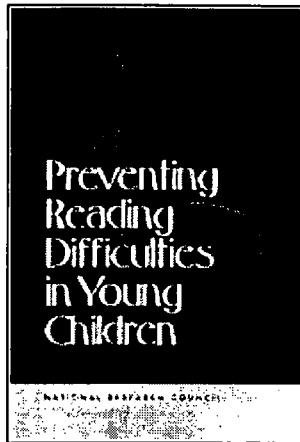
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Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children

The National Academy of Sciences



Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, Editors

Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council

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PREV

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Executive Summary

Reading is essential to success in our society. The ability to read is highly valued and important for social and economic advancement. Of course, most children learn to read fairly well. In this report, we are most concerned with the large numbers of children in America whose educational careers are imperiled because they do not read well enough to ensure understanding and to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive economy. Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy. In a technological society, the demands for higher literacy are ever increasing, creating more grievous consequences for those who fall short.

The importance of this problem led the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to ask the National Academy of Sciences to establish a committee to examine the prevention of reading difficulties. Our committee was charged with conducting a study of the effectiveness of interventions for young children who are at risk of having problems learning to read. The goals of the project were three: (1) to comprehend a rich but diverse research base; (2) to translate the research findings into advice and guidance for parents, educators, publishers, and others involved in the care and instruction of the young; and (3) to convey this advice to the targeted audiences through a variety of publications, conferences, and other outreach activities.

THE COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

The committee reviewed research on normal reading development and instruction; on risk factors useful in identifying groups and individuals at risk of reading failure; and on prevention, intervention, and instructional approaches to ensuring optimal reading outcomes.

We found many informative literatures to draw on and have aimed in this report to weave together the insights of many research traditions into clear guidelines for helping children become successful readers. In doing so, we also considered the current state of affairs in education for teachers and others working with young children; policies of federal, state, and local governments impinging on young children's education; the pressures on publishers of curriculum materials, texts, and tests; programs addressed to parents and to community action; and media activities.

Our main emphasis has been on the development of reading and on factors that relate to reading outcomes. We conceptualized our task as cutting through the detail of mostly convergent, but sometimes discrepant, research findings to provide an integrated picture of how reading develops and how its development can be promoted.

Our recommendations extend to all children. Granted, we have focused our lens on children at risk for learning to read. But much of the instructional research we have reviewed encompasses, for a variety of reasons, populations of students with varying degrees of risk. Good instruction seems to transcend

characterizations of children's vulnerability for failure; the same good early literacy environment and patterns of effective instruction are required for children who might fail for different reasons.

Does this mean that the identical mix of instructional materials and strategies will work for each and every child? Of course not. If we have learned anything from this effort, it is that effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. But it does mean that there is a common menu of materials, strategies, and environments from which effective teachers make choices. This in turn means that, as a society, our most important challenge is to make sure that our teachers have access to those tools and the knowledge required to use them well. In other words, there is little evidence that children experiencing difficulties learning to read, even those with identifiable learning disabilities, need radically different sorts of supports than children at low risk, although they may need much more intensive support. Childhood environments that support early literacy development and excellent instruction are important for all children. Excellent instruction is the best intervention for children who demonstrate problems learning to read.

CONCEPTUALIZING READING AND READING INSTRUCTION

Effective reading instruction is built on a foundation that recognizes that reading ability is determined by multiple factors: many factors that correlate with reading fail to explain it; many experiences contribute to reading development without being prerequisite to it; and although there are many prerequisites, none by itself is considered sufficient.

Adequate initial reading instruction requires that children:

- use reading to obtain meaning from print,
- have frequent and intensive opportunities to read,
- be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships,
- learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and
- understand the structure of spoken words.

Adequate progress in learning to read English (or any alphabetic language) beyond the initial level depends on:

- having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically,
- sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts,
- sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting,
- control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings, and
- continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

Reading skill is acquired in a relatively predictable way by children who have normal or above-average language skills; have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation and provided exposure to literacy in use; get information about the nature of print through opportunities to learn letters and to recognize the internal structure of spoken words, as well as explanations about the contrasting nature of spoken and written language; and attend schools that provide effective reading instruction and opportunities to practice reading.

Disruption of any of these developments increases the possibility that reading will be delayed or

impeded. The association of poor reading outcomes with poverty and minority status no doubt reflects the accumulated effects of several of these risk factors, including lack of access to literacy-stimulating preschool experiences and to excellent, coherent reading instruction. In addition, a number of children without any obvious risk factors also develop reading difficulties. These children may require intensive efforts at intervention and extra help in reading and accommodations for their disability throughout their lives.

There are three potential stumbling blocks that are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. The first obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle--the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious. The second obstacle is a failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. The third obstacle to reading will magnify the first two: the absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading.

As in every domain of learning, motivation is crucial. Although most children begin school with positive attitudes and expectations for success, by the end of the primary grades and increasingly thereafter, some children become disaffected. The majority of reading problems faced by today's adolescents and adults are the result of problems that might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood years. It is imperative that steps be taken to ensure that children overcome these obstacles during the primary grades.

Reducing the number of children who enter school with inadequate literacy-related knowledge and skill is an important primary step toward preventing reading difficulties. Although not a panacea, this would serve to reduce considerably the magnitude of the problem currently facing schools. Children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill in relevant domains, most notably general verbal abilities, the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge. Children from poor neighborhoods, children with limited proficiency in English, children with hearing impairments, children with preschool language impairments, and children whose parents had difficulty learning to read are particularly at risk of arriving at school with weaknesses in these areas and hence of falling behind from the outset.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The critical importance of providing excellent reading instruction to all children is at the heart of the committee's recommendations. Accordingly, our central recommendation characterizes the nature of good primary reading instruction. We also recognize that excellent instruction is most effective when children arrive in first grade motivated for literacy and with the necessary linguistic, cognitive, and early literacy skills. We therefore recommend attention to ensuring high-quality preschool and kindergarten environments as well. We acknowledge that excellent instruction in the primary grades and optimal environments in preschool and kindergarten require teachers who are well prepared, highly knowledgeable, and receiving ongoing support. Excellent instruction may be possible only if schools are organized in optimal ways; if facilities, curriculum materials, and support services function adequately; and if children's home languages are taken into account in designing instruction. We therefore make recommendations addressing these issues. (The complete text of all the committee's recommendations appears in Chapter 10.)

Literacy Instruction in First Through Third Grades

Given the centrality of excellent instruction to the prevention of reading difficulties, the committee strongly recommends attention in every primary-grade classroom to the full array of early reading accomplishments: the alphabetic principle, reading sight words, reading words by mapping speech sounds to parts of words, achieving fluency, and comprehension. Getting started in alphabetic reading depends critically on mapping the letters and spellings of words onto the speech units that they represent; failure to master word recognition can impede text comprehension. Explicit instruction that

directs children's attention to the sound structure of oral language and to the connections between speech sounds and spellings assists children who have not grasped the alphabetic principle or who do not apply it productively when they encounter unfamiliar printed words.

Comprehension difficulties can be prevented by actively building comprehension skills as well as linguistic and conceptual knowledge, beginning in the earliest grades. Comprehension can be enhanced through instruction focused on concept and vocabulary growth and background knowledge, instruction about the syntax and rhetorical structures of written language, and direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing, predicting, and monitoring. Comprehension also takes practice, which is gained by reading independently, by reading in pairs or groups, and by being read aloud to.

We recommend that first through third grade curricula include the following components:

- Beginning readers need explicit instruction and practice that lead to an appreciation that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud. Fluency should be promoted through practice with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level.
- Children who have started to read independently, typically second graders and above, should be encouraged to sound out and confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful texts, recognizing words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships. Although context and pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word.
- Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both of the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent.
- Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains, as well as through direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing the main idea, predicting events and outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings. This instruction can take place while adults read to students or when students read themselves.
- Once children learn some letters, they should be encouraged to write them, to use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and to use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place regularly and frequently to encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it.
- Throughout the early grades, time, materials, and resources should be provided with two goals: (a) to support daily independent reading of texts selected to be of particular interest for the individual student, and beneath the individual student's frustration level, in order to consolidate the student's capacity for independent reading and (b) to support daily assisted or supported reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure in order to promote advances in the student's capabilities.

- Throughout the early grades, schools should promote independent reading outside school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments and expectations, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this goal.

Promoting Literacy Development in Preschool and Kindergarten

It is clear from the research that the process of learning to read is a lengthy one that begins very early in life. Given the importance identified in the research literature of starting school motivated to read and with the prerequisite language and early literacy skills, the committee recommends that all children, especially those at risk for reading difficulties, should have access to early childhood environments that promote language and literacy growth and that address a variety of skills that have been identified as predictors of later reading achievement. Preschools and other group care settings for young children often provide relatively impoverished language and literacy environments, in particular those available to families with limited economic resources. As ever more young children are entering group care settings pursuant to expectations that their mothers will join the work force, it becomes critical that the preschool opportunities available to lower-income families be designed in ways that support language and literacy development.

Preschool programs, even those designed specifically as interventions for children at risk of reading difficulties, should be designed to provide optimal support for cognitive, language, and social development, within this broad focus. However, ample attention should be paid to skills that are known to predict future reading achievement, especially those for which a causal role has been demonstrated. Similarly, and for the same reasons, kindergarten instruction should be designed to stimulate verbal interaction; to enrich children's vocabularies; to encourage talk about books; to provide practice with the sound structure of words; to develop knowledge about print, including the production and recognition of letters; and to generate familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading.

Children who will probably need additional support for early language and literacy development should receive it as early as possible. Pediatricians, social workers, speech-language therapists, and other preschool practitioners should receive research-based guidelines to assist them to be alert for signs that children are having difficulties acquiring early language and literacy skills. Parents, relatives, neighbors, and friends can also play a role in identifying children who need assistance. Through adult education programs, public service media, instructional videos provided by pediatricians, and other means, parents can be informed about what skills and knowledge children should be acquiring at young ages, and about what to do and where to turn if there is concern that a child's development may be lagging behind in some respects.

Education and Professional Development for All Involved in Literacy Instruction

The critical importance of the teacher in the prevention of reading difficulties must be recognized, and efforts should be made to provide all teachers with adequate knowledge about reading and the knowledge and skill to teach reading or its developmental precursors. It is imperative that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction in optimizing literacy development.

Preschool teachers represent an important, and largely under-utilized, resource in promoting literacy by supporting rich language and emergent literacy skills. Early childhood educators should not try to replicate the formal reading instruction provided in schools.

The preschool and primary school teacher's knowledge and experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher, are central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties. Each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development. A critical component in the preparation of pre-service teachers is supervised, relevant, clinical experience providing ongoing guidance and feedback, so they develop the ability to integrate and apply their knowledge in practice.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the research foundations of reading. Collaborative support by the teacher preparation institution and the field placement is essential. A critical component for novice teachers is the support of mentors who have demonstrated records of success in teaching reading.

Professional development should not be conceived as something that ends with graduation from a teacher preparation program, nor as something that happens primarily in graduate classrooms or even during in-service activities. Rather, ongoing support from colleagues and specialists, as well as regular opportunities for self-examination and reflection, are critical components of the career-long development of excellent teachers.

Teaching Reading to Speakers of Other Languages

Schools have the responsibility to accommodate the linguistic needs of students with limited proficiency in English. Precisely how to do this is difficult to prescribe, because students' abilities and needs vary greatly, as do the capacities of different communities to support their literacy development. The committee recommends the following guidelines for decision making:

- If language-minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speaking a language for which there are instructional guides, learning materials, and locally available proficient teachers, these children should be taught how to read in their native language while acquiring proficiency in spoken English and then subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.
- If language-minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speak a language for which the above conditions cannot be met and for which there are insufficient numbers of children to justify the development of the local capacity to meet such conditions, the instructional priority should be to develop the children's proficiency in spoken English. Although print materials may be used to develop understanding of English speech sounds, vocabulary, and syntax, the postponement of formal reading instruction is appropriate until an adequate level of proficiency in spoken English has been achieved.

Ensuring Adequate Resources to Meet Children's Needs

To be effective, schools with large numbers of children at risk for reading difficulties need rich resources--manageable class sizes and student-teacher ratios, high-quality instructional materials in sufficient quantity, good school libraries, and pleasant physical environments. Achieving this may require extra resources for schools that serve a disproportionate number of high-risk children.

Even in schools in which a large percentage of the students are not achieving at a satisfactory level, a well-designed classroom reading program, delivered by an experienced and competent teacher, may be successful in bringing most students to grade level or above during the primary grades. However, achieving and sustaining radical gains is often difficult when improvements are introduced on a classroom-by-classroom basis. In a situation of school-wide poor performance, school restructuring should be considered as a vehicle for preventing reading difficulties. Ongoing professional development for teachers is typically a component of successful school restructuring efforts.

Addressing the Needs of Children with Persistent Reading Difficulties

Even with excellent instruction in the early grades, some children fail to make satisfactory progress in reading. Such children will require supplementary services, ideally from a reading specialist who provides individual or small-group intensive instruction that is coordinated with high-quality instruction from the classroom teacher. Children who are having difficulty learning to read do not, as a rule, require qualitatively different instruction from children who are "getting it." Instead, they more often need application of the same principles by someone who can apply them expertly to individual children who are having difficulty for one reason or another.

Schools that lack or have abandoned reading specialist positions need to reexamine their needs for such specialists to ensure that well-trained staff are available for intervention with children and for ongoing support to classroom teachers. Reading specialists and other specialist roles need to be defined so that two-way communication is required between specialists and classroom teachers about the needs of all children at risk of or experiencing reading difficulties. Coordination is needed at the instructional level so that intervention from specialists coordinates with and supports classroom instruction. Schools that have reading specialists as well as special educators need to coordinate the roles of these specialists. Schools need to ensure that all the specialists engaged in child study or individualized educational program (IEP) meetings for special education placement, early childhood intervention, out-of-classroom interventions, or in-classroom support are well informed about research in reading development and the prevention of reading difficulties.

Although volunteer tutors can provide valuable practice and motivational support for children learning to read, they should not be expected either to provide primary reading instruction or to instruct children with serious reading problems.

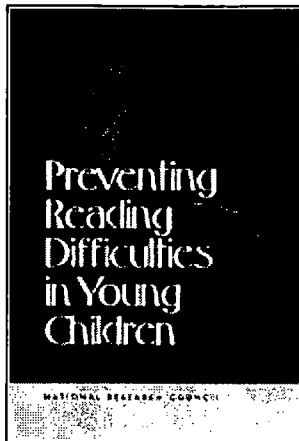
CONCLUSION

Most reading difficulties can be prevented. There is much work to be done, however, that requires the aggressive deployment of the information currently available, which is distilled in this report. In addition, many questions remain unanswered concerning reading development, some of which we address in our recommendations for research. While science continues to discover more about how children learn to read and how teachers and others can help them, the knowledge currently available can equip our society to promote higher levels of literacy for large numbers of American schoolchildren. The committee's hope is that the recommendations contained in this report will provide direction for the first important steps.

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Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, Editors

Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council

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PART IV: KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

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Recommendations for Practice and Research

As the committee began its study, it was well aware of the history of controversies that have enveloped reading instruction in the United States, and it assumed that the science base had developed sufficiently to finally put recommendations regarding reading instruction on sound scientific footing. The process of conducting this study, of examining the research on reading, has confirmed this assumption. We have found many informative literatures to draw upon and hope, with this chapter, to weave the insights of many research traditions into clear guidelines for helping children become successful readers.

Our main emphasis has been on the development of reading and on factors that relate to reading outcomes. We have conceptualized our task as cutting through the detail of mostly convergent, sometimes discrepant research findings to provide an integrated picture of how reading develops and thus how its development should be promoted.

CONCEPTUALIZING READING AND READING INSTRUCTION

Effective reading instruction is built on a foundation that recognizes that reading outcomes are determined by complex and multifaceted factors. On the assumption that understanding can move public discussion beyond the polemics of the past, we have made it an important goal of this report to make the complexities known: many factors that correlate with reading fail to explain it; many experiences contribute to reading development without being prerequisite to it; and although there are many prerequisites, none by itself appears to be sufficient. Our review of the research literature makes clear, nevertheless, the general requirements of effective reading instruction.

Adequate initial reading instruction requires a focus on:

- using reading to obtain meaning from print;
- the sublexical¹ structure of spoken words;
- the nature of the orthographic² system;

- the specifics of frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships;
- frequent opportunities to read; and
- opportunities to write.

Adequate progress in learning to read English beyond the initial level depends on:

- having established a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically;
- sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts written for different purposes; and
- control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings.

Effective instruction includes artful teaching that transcends--and often makes up for--the constraints and limitations of specific instructional programs. Although we have not incorporated lessons from artful teaching practices with the same comprehensiveness as other topics in the conventional research on reading, we acknowledge their importance in conceptualizing effective reading instruction.

Reading is typically acquired relatively predictably by children who:

- have normal or above average language skills;
- have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation and provided exposure to literacy in use;
- are given information about the nature of print via opportunities to learn letters and to recognize the sublexical structure of spoken words, as well as about the contrasting nature of spoken and written language; and
- attend schools that provide coherent reading instruction and opportunities to practice reading.

Disruption of any of these factors increases the risk that reading will be delayed or impeded, a phenomenon particularly prevalent in impoverished urban and rural neighborhoods and among disadvantaged minority populations. Within all demographic groups, children with speech or language impairments, cognitive deficits, hearing impairments or who have a biological parent with a reading disability are at risk for reading difficulties. There are also a number of children, evidently without any of these risk factors, who nonetheless develop reading difficulties. Such children may require intensive intervention and may continue to benefit from extra help in reading and accommodations for their disability throughout their lives. An additional very small population of children with severe cognitive disabilities that limit literacy learning will for a variety of reasons have difficulty ever achieving high levels of literacy.

Three main stumbling blocks are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. One obstacle is difficulty in understanding and using the alphabetic principle. Failure to grasp that written spellings systematically represent the sounds of spoken words makes it difficult not only to recognize printed words but also to understand how to learn and to profit from instruction. If a child cannot rely on the alphabetic principle, word recognition is inaccurate or laborious and comprehension of connected text will be impeded. A second obstacle is the failure to acquire and use comprehension skills and strategies. A third obstacle involves motivation. Although most children begin school with positive attitudes and expectations for success, by the end of the primary grades, and increasingly thereafter, some children become disaffected. Difficulties mastering sound-letter relationships or comprehension skills can easily stifle motivation, which can in turn hamper instructional efforts.

Levels of literacy adequate for high school completion, employability, and responsible citizenship in a

democracy are feasible for all but a very small number of individuals. Yet a substantial percentage of American youth graduate from high school with very low levels of literacy. These youth are particularly likely to be from subgroups in our population that traditionally have done poorly in school (African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) or to be from poor urban neighborhoods. However, low literacy at the high school level characterizes many students from all subgroups, including students who do not belong to identified risk groups. Most of the reading problems faced by today's adolescents and adults are the result of problems that might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood years.

In this chapter, we present our major findings, conclusions, and recommendations. We begin with primary and secondary prevention³ during the preschool years. We then move to primary and secondary prevention through educational practice from kindergarten through third grade, with particular attention to the provision of high-quality classroom instruction in early reading to all children. Next we address teacher preparation and professional support. The final section provides a research agenda that includes attention to assessment and its role in identifying effective prevention strategies. Although assessment is not at the core of the committee's expertise, we became convinced in the process of the study that the importance of assessment warranted the attention of the field and of our project sponsors.

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

Public Understanding of Early Literacy Development

Findings: There is abundant empirical and observational evidence that the children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill in certain domains, most notably, general verbal abilities, phonological sensitivity, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge. Children from poor neighborhoods, children with limited proficiency in English, children with hearing impairments, children with preschool language impairments or cognitive deficiencies, and children whose parents had difficulty learning to read are particularly at risk of arriving at school with weaknesses in these areas and, as a result, of falling behind from the outset.

Conclusion: It is clear from the research on emergent literacy that important experiences related to reading begin very early in life. Primary prevention steps designed to reduce the number of children with inadequate literacy-related knowledge (e.g., concepts of print,⁴ phonemic awareness, receptive vocabulary) at the onset of formal schooling would considerably reduce the number of children with reading difficulties and, thereby, the magnitude of the problem currently facing schools.

Recommendation: We recommend that organizations and government bodies concerned with the education of young children (e.g., the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the International Reading Association, state departments of education, the U.S. Department of Education) promote public understanding of early literacy development. Systematic and widespread public education and marketing efforts should be undertaken to increase public awareness of the importance of providing stimulating literacy experiences in the lives of all very young children. Parents and other caregivers, as well as the public, should be the targets of such efforts, which should address ways of using books and opportunities for building language and literacy growth through everyday activities both at home and in group care settings.

Identification of Preschool Children with Special Language and Literacy Needs

Findings: Cognitive and educational research demonstrates the negative effects of deferring identification of, and intervention for, children who need additional support for early language and literacy development. They include those who have a hearing impairment, are diagnosed as having a specific early language impairment, are offspring of parents with histories of reading difficulty, or lack age-appropriate skills in literacy-related cognitive-linguistic processing. There is growing evidence that

less supportive early environments for acquiring literacy tend to be associated with several known risk groups, and that some individual risk factors can be identified prior to kindergarten.

Conclusions: Children who are at risk for reading difficulties should be identified as early as possible. Pediatricians, social workers, speech and language therapists, and other preschool practitioners need to be alert for signs that children are having difficulties acquiring early language and literacy skills. Parents and other adults (relatives, neighbors, friends) also play a crucial role in identifying children who need assistance.

Research-derived indicators for potential problems include:

- in infancy or during the preschool period, significant delays in expressive language, receptive vocabulary, or IQ;
- at school entry, delays in a combination of measures of readiness, including
 - letter identification,
 - understanding the functions of print,
 - verbal memory for stories and sentences,
 - phonological awareness, ⁵
 - lexical skills such as naming vocabulary,
 - receptive language skills in the areas of syntax and morphology,
 - expressive language, and
 - overall language development.

Through adult education programs, public service media, instructional videos provided by pediatricians, and other means, parents can be informed about the skills and knowledge children should be acquiring at young ages and about what to do and where to turn if there is concern that a child's development may be lagging in some respect.

Recommendation: Public authorities and education professionals should provide research-derived guidelines for parents, pediatricians, and preschool professionals so that children who have a hearing or language impairment or who lack age-appropriate skills in literacy-related cognitive-linguistic processing are identified as early as possible and given intervention to support language and literacy development.

Promoting Language and Literacy Growth

Findings: Research with preschoolers has demonstrated that (a) adult-child shared book reading that stimulates verbal interaction can enhance language (especially vocabulary) development and knowledge about concepts of print, and (b) activities that direct young children's attention to the sound structure within spoken words (e.g., play with songs and poems that emphasize rhyming, jokes, and games that depend on switching sounds within words), and to the relations between print and speech can facilitate learning to read. These findings are buttressed by others showing that knowledge of word meanings, an understanding that print conveys meaning, phonological awareness, and some understanding of how printed letters code the sounds of language contribute directly to successful reading. Other preschool abilities, such as identifying letters, numbers, shapes, and colors, may correlate with future reading achievement, but neither research findings nor theories of reading are available to support the notion that they have a causal link to learning to read.

Failure to develop an adequate vocabulary, understanding of print concepts, or phonological awareness during the preschool years constitutes some risk for reading difficulties. Hence, we recommend interventions designed to promote their growth. At the same time, however, we caution that the focus of intervention should not be limited to overcoming these risk factors in isolation but should be more broadly designed to provide a rich language and literacy environment that methodically includes the promotion of vocabulary, the understanding of print concepts, and phonological awareness. Preschools and other group care settings for young children, including those at risk for reading difficulties, too often constitute poor language and literacy environments. Targeted interventions indicate that literacy and language environments can be improved.

Conclusions: Research provides ample evidence of the importance of cultivating cognitive, language, and social development during children's early years. As ever more young children are entering group care settings pursuant to expectations that their mothers will join the work force, it becomes critical that the preschool opportunities available to lower-income families be designed in ways that fully support language and literacy development. This is perhaps one of the more important public policy issues raised by welfare reform.

Recommendations: All children, especially those at risk for reading difficulties, should have access to early childhood environments that promote language and literacy growth and that address reading risk factors in an integrated rather than isolated fashion. Specifically, we recommend that the following be included in home and preschool activities:

- adult-child shared book reading that stimulates verbal interaction to enhance language (especially vocabulary) development and knowledge about print concepts,
- activities that direct young children's attention to the phonological structure of spoken words (e.g., games, songs and poems that emphasize rhyming or manipulation of sounds), and
- activities that highlight the relations between print and speech.

ENSURING THAT CHILDREN HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN TO READ

Reading Instruction in Kindergarten Through Third Grade

Findings on the mechanics of reading: There is converging research support for the proposition that getting started in reading depends critically on mapping the letters and the spellings of words onto the sounds and speech units that they represent. Failure to master word recognition impedes text comprehension.

There is evidence that explicit instruction that directs children's attention to the phonological structure of oral language and to the connections between phonemes and spellings helps children who have not grasped the alphabetic principle or who do not apply it productively when they encounter unfamiliar printed words. Of course, intensity of instruction should be matched to children's needs. Children who lack these understandings should be helped to acquire them; those who have grasped the alphabetic principle and can apply it productively should move on to more advanced learning opportunities.

Findings on comprehension: Several factors have been shown to promote comprehension: vocabulary, including full and precise understanding of the meanings of words; background knowledge about the subject matter; familiarity with semantic and syntactic structures that signal meaningful relationships among the words; appreciation of the writing conventions used to achieve different communicative purposes (e.g., irony, humor); verbal reasoning ability, which permits inferences to be made by reading between the lines; and verbal memory capacity.

Comprehension can be enhanced through instruction that is focused on concept and vocabulary growth and the syntax and rhetorical structures of written language, as well as through experience gained by reading both independently and interactively in dyads or groups.

Explicit instruction in comprehension strategies has been shown to lead to improvement (e.g., summarizing the main idea, predicting what text will follow, drawing inferences, discussing the author's communicative intent and choice of wording, and monitoring for misunderstandings).

Conclusions: Our analysis of the research literature in reading acquisition leads us to conclude that, in order to prevent reading difficulties, formal instruction in reading needs to focus on the development of two sorts of mastery: word recognition skills and comprehension skills.

Recommendations on the mechanics of reading:

- Kindergarten instruction should be designed to provide practice with the sound structure of words, the recognition and production of letters, knowledge about print concepts, and familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading and writing.
- First-grade instruction should be designed to provide explicit instruction and practice with sound structures that lead to phonemic awareness, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud. A wide variety of well-written and engaging texts below the children's frustration level should be provided.
- Instruction for children who have started to read independently, typically second graders and above, should be designed to encourage children to sound out and confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful text, recognizing words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships. Although context and pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word.
- Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both of the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response where difficulty or delay is apparent.

Recommendations on comprehension:

- Kindergarten instruction should be designed to stimulate verbal interaction to instruct vocabulary and encourage talk about books.
- Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains.
- Throughout the early grades, reading curricula should include explicit instruction on strategies such as summarizing the main idea, predicting events and outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings. This instruction can take place while adults read to students or when students read themselves.
- Conceptual knowledge and comprehension strategies should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response where difficulty or delay is apparent.

Recommendations on writing:

- Once children learn to write letters, they should be encouraged to write them, to use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and to use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme segmentation, and sound-spelling relationships.

Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place on a daily basis to encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it.

Recommendations on reading practices and motivation:

- Throughout the early grades, time, materials, and resources should be provided (a) to support daily independent reading of texts selected to be of particular interest for the individual student, and also beneath the individual student's frustration level, in order to consolidate the student's capacity for independent reading and (b) to support daily assisted or supported reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure in order to promote advances in the student's capacities.
- Throughout the early grades, schools should promote independent reading outside of school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments and expectations, summer reading lists, encouraging parental involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this same goal.

Students with Limited Proficiency in English

Findings: Hurrying young non-English-speaking children into reading in English without ensuring adequate preparation is counterproductive. Learning to speak English first contributes to children's eventual fluency in English reading, because it provides a foundation to support subsequent learning about the alphabetic principle through an understanding of the sublexical structure of spoken English words and of the language and content of the material they are reading. The abilities to hear and reflect on the sublexical structure of spoken English words, as required for learning how the alphabetic principle works, depend on oral familiarity with the words being read. Similarly, learning to read for meaning depends on understanding the language and referents of the text to be read. Moreover, because being able to read and write in two languages confers numerous intellectual, cultural, economic, and social benefits, bilingualism and biliteracy should be supported whenever possible. To the extent possible, non-English-speaking children should have opportunities to develop literacy skills in their home language as well as in English.

Recommendations:

- If language-minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speaking a language for which there are instructional guides, learning materials, and locally available proficient teachers, these children should be taught how to read in their native language while acquiring oral proficiency in English and subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.
- If language-minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speak a language for which the above conditions cannot be met and for which there are insufficient numbers of children to justify the development of the local capacity to meet such conditions, the initial instructional priority should be developing the children's oral proficiency in English. Although print materials may be used to support the development of English phonology, vocabulary, and syntax, the postponement of formal reading instruction is appropriate until an adequate level of oral proficiency in English has been achieved.

School-wide Restructuring

Findings: When a large percentage of a school's students are from disadvantaged homes, it is often the case that median student reading achievements in that school will be low. Research has shown the effectiveness of clearly articulated, well-implemented, school-wide efforts that build from coherent classroom reading instruction. Such school-wide efforts, when they have included coherent regular classroom reading instruction consistent with the principles articulated in this report, have often proven

substantially more effective than disconnected strategies or restructuring focused on organizational issues that have not included school-wide curricular reform.

Conclusion: The local adaptation of national models is often a more efficient route to meaningful reform than are numerous local efforts to "reinvent the wheel."

Recommendation: In situations of school-wide poor performance, school restructuring designs that include dual foci on organizational issues and coherent classroom reading instruction should be seriously considered.

Extended Time in Reading-Related Instruction for Children with Persistent Reading Difficulties

Thus far, we have emphasized quality instruction and an appropriate curriculum, keyed to high standards, as the primary route to preventing most reading difficulties. However, additional efforts will still be necessary for some children, including supplementary tutoring provided by professionals with specialties in reading and special education support and services.

Findings: At present, many interventions for children in the primary grades are aimed at helping those most at risk of failure, but they are too often implemented as late as third grade, after a child is well behind his or her classmates.

Supplementary instruction has merit if the intervention is time limited and is planned and delivered in a way that makes connections to the daily experiences that the child has during reading instruction. Supplementary instruction can be a significant and targeted enhancement of classroom instruction. In Chapter 8 we presented a number of programs that have supplementary components, but the empirical bases for judging their results are often weak.

Conclusions: Consistent with the view that reading develops under the influence of many early experiences, it is the committee's judgment that deferring intervention until third or fourth grade should be avoided at all costs.

Supplementary programs can neither substitute nor compensate for poor-quality classroom reading instruction. Supplementary instruction is a secondary response to learning difficulties. Although supplementary instruction has demonstrated merit, its impact is insufficient unless it is planned and delivered in ways that make clear connections to the child's daily experiences and needs during reading instruction in the classroom.

Recommendation: If a student is receiving high-quality classroom instruction in first grade but is still having reading related difficulties, we recommend the following:

- Additional instructional services in supplementary reading programs should be provided in the first grade.
- Instruction should be provided by a well-qualified reading specialist who has demonstrated the ability to produce high levels of student achievement in reading.
- Materials and instructional techniques should be provided that are well integrated with ongoing excellent classroom instruction and that are consistent with the findings, conclusions, and recommendations identified above in "Reading Instruction in Kindergarten Through Third Grade." Children who are having difficulty learning to read do not, as a rule, require qualitatively different instruction from children who are "getting it." Instead, they more often need application of the same principles by someone who can apply them expertly to individual children who are having difficulty for one reason or another.

Resources to Meet Needs

Findings: The interventions described in this report require manageable class size and student-teacher ratios, ongoing teacher preparation, qualified specialists, and quality instructional materials in sufficient quantity. School libraries and media resources need to be used effectively. Nationally, there are steady reductions in the average size of elementary classrooms; however, schools in poor urban areas continue to show higher class sizes than schools in all other areas.

Conclusions: To meet the goal of preventing reading difficulties, a greater burden will fall on schools whose entering students are least prepared in the requisite skills (e.g., schools in poor urban areas, schools with high numbers of children who have limited English proficiency). The resources provided for kindergarten and primary-grade classrooms should be proportional to the amount of instructional support needed, as gauged by the entry abilities of the school's population. This type of resource planning contrasts with the practice of giving schools bonuses for high test scores as well as practices directed toward equating per-pupil resources across schools.

Recommendations: To be effective, schools with greater numbers of children at risk for reading difficulties must have extra resources. These resources should be used to ensure that class size, student-teacher ratios, teacher preparation and experience, availability and qualifications of specialists, quality and quantity of instructional materials, school libraries and physical environments will be at least equal to those of schools whose students are less likely to have difficulties learning to read.

Volunteer Tutors

Findings: Although volunteer tutors can provide very valuable practice and motivational support for children learning to read, the committee did not find evidence confirming that they are able to deal effectively with children who have serious reading problems. Effective tutoring programs require comprehensive screening procedures for selecting volunteers, training tutors, and supervising their ongoing work with children.

Conclusions: Volunteer tutors are effective in reading to children, for giving children supervised practice in oral reading, and for allowing opportunities for enriching conversation but not usually in providing instruction per se, particularly for children having difficulties.

Recommendation: The role of well-trained and supervised volunteer tutors should be to expand children's opportunities for practicing reading and for motivational support but not to provide primary or remedial instruction.

PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY TEACHERS

Beginning Teachers

Findings: Some beginning teachers do not have sufficient education to enable them to help all children become successful readers. Virtually all states require that candidates for a K-3 teacher credential do at least some course work in the teaching of reading. Too often, however, such course work is insufficient to provide beginning teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to enable them to help all children become successful readers. One major factor is that very little time is allocated for preparing teachers to teach reading. A second is that teacher training programs are highly variable in their inclusion of the foundations of reading.

Conclusions: A critical element for preventing reading difficulties in young children is the teacher. Central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties is the teacher's knowledge base and experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher; each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development and his or her role in the school.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the research foundations of reading. Beyond this, a critical component in the pre-service preparation of primary-grade teachers is supervised, relevant, clinical experience in which they receive ongoing guidance and feedback. A principal goal of this experience is

the ability to integrate and apply the knowledge base in practice. Collaborative support by the teacher preparation institution and the field placement supervising teacher is essential. A critical component for novice teachers is the support of mentor teachers with excellent records of success in teaching reading that results in improved student outcomes.

Recommendations: It is absolutely essential that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction in optimizing literacy development. State certification requirements and teacher education curricula should be changed to incorporate this knowledge base, including at a minimum:

- information about language development as it relates to literacy;
- information about the relationship between early literacy behavior and conventional reading;
- information about the features of an alphabetic writing system and other writing systems;
- information about both phonology and morphology in relation to spelling;
- information about comprehension and its dependence on other aspects of reading and on language skills;
- information about phonological awareness, orthographic awareness, and writing development;
- procedures for ongoing, in-class assessment of children's reading abilities;
- information on how to interpret and modify instruction according to norm-referenced and individually referenced assessment outcomes, including in-class assessments and progress monitoring measures used by specialists;
- information about the learning and curricular needs of diverse learners (students with disabilities, with limited English proficiency, with English-language dialect differences);
- in settings in which children are learning to read in a language other than English, an understanding of--as well as strategies and techniques for--teaching children to read in that language and information about bilingual language and literacy development;
- in settings in which non-English-speaking or limited-English-speaking students are in an English as a second language program and learn to read in English, information and skill to help these students confront a double challenge: learning to read and learning a new language;
- information on the design features and requirements of a reading curriculum;
- information about how teachers apply research judiciously to their practice, how to update their research knowledge, and how to influence research agendas, including teacher-researcher collaborations; and
- information about how to maintain and promote motivation to read and positive attitudes toward reading.

Ongoing Staff Development

Findings: Staff development efforts are often inadequate for a number of reasons, including the lack of substantive and research-based content, the lack of systematic follow-up necessary for sustainability, and the one-shot character of many staff development sessions.

Conclusions: Teachers require ongoing in-service staff development support to absorb the information about reading and reading instruction outlined above. Professional development should not be conceived

as something that ends with graduation from a teacher preparation program, nor as something that happens primarily in graduate classrooms or even during in-service activities. Rather, ongoing support from colleagues and specialists as well as regular opportunities for self-examination and reflection are critical components of the career-long development of excellent teachers.

Recommendation: Local education authorities and teacher education programs should give teachers support and skills throughout their careers, especially during their early entry into the profession, to ensure that they are well prepared to carry out their mission in preventing reading difficulties in young children.

Early Childhood Educators

Findings: Many preschool programs do not focus on language and literacy experiences that provide a foundation for early reading instruction.

Conclusions: Preschool teachers represent an important--and largely underutilized--resource in promoting literacy through the acquisition of rich language and emergent literacy skills. Early childhood educators should not try to replicate the formal reading instruction provided in schools. Central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties is the preschool teacher's knowledge base and experience and the support provided to the teacher; each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development.

As with primary-grade teachers, a critical component in the pre-service preparation of teachers is supervised, relevant, clinical experience in which they receive ongoing guidance and feedback. A principal goal of this experience is the ability to integrate and apply the knowledge base in practice. Collaborative support by the teacher preparation institution and the field placement is essential.

Recommendations: Programs that educate early childhood professionals should require mastery of information about the many kinds of knowledge and skills that can be acquired in the preschool years in preparation for reading achievement in school. Their knowledge base should include at least the following:

- information about how to provide rich conceptual experiences that promote growth in vocabulary and reasoning skills;
- knowledge about lexical development, from early referential (naming) abilities to relational and abstract terms and finer-shaded meanings;
- knowledge of the early development of listening comprehension skills, and the kinds of syntactic and prose structures that preschool children may not yet have mastered;
- information on young children's sense of story;
- information on young children's sensitivity to the sounds of language;
- information on young children's understanding of concepts of print, and the developmental patterns of emergent reading and writing;
- information on young children's development of concepts of space, including directionality;
- knowledge of fine motor development; and
- knowledge about how to instill motivation to read.

Professional Reading Specialists

Findings: Special educators, speech and language clinicians, English as a second language teachers,

resource room teachers, and other individuals are available in many schools to support the work of the classroom teacher to prevent reading difficulties. Too often, though, these professionals lack specialized knowledge about the typical and atypical development of reading and of their role in supporting reading instruction.

Conclusions: Schools that lack or have abandoned reading specialist positions need to reexamine their needs for specialists and provide the functional equivalent of such well-trained staff members. Reading specialists and other specialist roles need to be defined so that two-way communication is between specialists and classroom teachers about the needs of all children at risk of and experiencing reading difficulties. Coordination is needed at the instructional level so that children are taught with methodologies that are synergistic and not fragmented. Schools that have reading specialists as well as special educators need to coordinate these roles. Schools need to ensure that all the specialists engaged in child study or individualized educational program (IEP) meetings for special education placement, early childhood intervention, out-of-classroom interventions, or in-classroom support are well informed about research in reading development and the prevention of reading difficulties.

Recommendations: Every school should have access to specialists, including speech and language clinicians, English as a second language teachers, resource room teachers, and reading specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can give guidance to classroom teachers.

Educational Products and In-Service Development

Findings: There is currently no requirement and little incentive for publishers or adopting schools to evaluate reading-related materials and in-service programs in terms of their efficacy.

Conclusions: Given the significant expenditures on commercially distributed educational products as well as the widespread reliance on the instructional plans and activities they present, critical attention to the instructional quality of textbooks, basal reading series, curriculum kits, education software, and "promising programs" is both distressingly absent and urgently needed.

Recommendation: Local education agencies should set specific standards of evidence of efficacy for reading-related materials and in-service programs. Materials purveyors that currently do not provide adequate evidence to support data-based decision making about their products should be required to do so. These standards should be used when states, districts, schools, and teachers are choosing materials.

RESEARCH AGENDA

The process of study and discussion on what is known about the effective prevention of reading difficulties in young children has led us to recognize a number of issues that are in special need of attention from researchers. In particular, we have identified two newly emerging areas for research, several related to assessment, and several related to research on interventions.

Emerging Areas for Research

Benchmarks and Standards

Findings: Many state and local school districts have recently developed benchmarks or standards specifying what reading skills children should have acquired at successive points during their school careers. These efforts vary substantively not only in their content, structure, and specificity but also in proposals for their dissemination and use.

Research affirms that such benchmarks or standards can effectively improve reading outcomes but only to the extent that they are valid, specific, meaningful to teachers, and actually influence instructional conduct on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, such benchmarks and standards potentially afford invaluable guidance to school personnel, curriculum planners, publishers, software developers, test designers, and educational researchers for purposes of designing and evaluating instructional plans and materials,

designing and evaluating intervention efforts, monitoring progress over time against a constant standard, and developing more sensitive and informative assessments. However, the broader realization of all such benefits will depend on establishing within the educational system new methods and modes for evaluating and iteratively improving, not only the benchmarks themselves but also the various options for their application.

Recommendation: Toward promoting high standards of achievement for all students in all schools, state and local education departments should sponsor research to evaluate and improve the utility and uses of their benchmarks or standards of reading achievement for purposes of informing instruction, evaluation, and allocation of resources and effort, including staffing and staff development as well as student service options.

Basic Research

Findings: As documented in this report, recent progress in understanding reading and its difficulties is largely the product, direct and indirect, of findings from basic research. Key contributions have ensued from a number of disciplines, including the neurosciences, linguistics, computer science, statistics, and the psychologies of memory, perception, cognition, and development. Significant contributions from basic research have clustered under funding programs that have emphasized the study of reading and its difficulties, and they have often been enabled by emerging technologies and computational and analytical techniques.

Recommendation: Government agencies and private foundations should ensure strong and continuing support of basic research and associated instrumentation in conjunction with active emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge relevant to reading and its difficulties.

Research Related to Assessment

Screening and Identification

Findings: Much has been learned about which particular differences among preschoolers and kindergartners are most prognostic of early reading outcomes, and these findings, in turn, have enabled more effective programs of early intervention. However, the array of instruments currently used to measure such differences are time consuming and costly to administer, even as they are mutually redundant and collectively incomplete with respect to the range of knowledge and sensitivities on which reading growth, including longer-term reading growth, depends. Such measures need to be refined, extended, and, as appropriate, combined into screening batteries that are maximally informative and efficient.

Recommendation: Appropriate government agencies and private foundations should sponsor research and development directed toward improving the efficiency, scope, and sensitivity of screening instruments for identifying children at risk of experiencing difficulties in learning to read so as best to ensure early, effective intervention. Such efforts should address factors that influence the development of the knowledge and capabilities that constrain literacy growth in the middle and later grades, as well as those related to initial reading acquisition.

Informal and Curriculum-Based Assessment

Findings: Given that effective instruction consists of responding to children's needs while building on their strengths, it necessarily depends on a sensitive and continual capacity for monitoring student progress. Toward this end, classroom teachers and tutors are in need of a richer and more serviceable inventory of assessment tools and strategies for day-to-day use in verifying that children are reaching curricular goals on schedule, in identifying children in need of extra help or opportunity, in specifying the particular nature of their needs, and in recognizing when difficulties have been adequately overcome to move on. Currently, the availability, quality, and best use of such assessment options vary greatly across classrooms and districts.

Recommendation: Toward the goal of assisting teachers in day-to-day monitoring of student progress along the array of dimensions on which reading growth depends, the appropriate government agencies and private foundations should sponsor evaluation, synthesis, and, as necessary, further development of informal and curriculum-based assessment tools and strategies. In complement, state and local school districts should undertake concerted effort to assist teachers and reading specialists in understanding how best to administer, interpret, and instructionally respond to such assessments.

Decision Making at the School and District Levels

Findings: Schools and school districts are constantly confronted with proposals for curricular or organizational change. Whether gauged in terms of time and money or opportunity and hope, the costs of implementing and even considering such change are substantial. Nevertheless, adequate evaluation of the value added by such efforts is rare in prospect or outcome. Decisions about whether to adopt a new basal program, and if so which one, are an obvious case in point. Concern extends to the range of systemic changes, including, for example, implementation of new student services, such as tutoring programs or after-school instruction, new professional development initiatives, and even new evaluation strategies.

Recommendation: The appropriate government agencies and private foundations should sponsor research to help school systems develop and use data-based decision making. This effort should include methods and means for:

- analysis of the system's strengths and weaknesses so as to identify and prioritize needs;
- evaluation the costs and benefits of proposed solutions to targeted problems so as to guide selection of--or, as necessary, the adaptation or design of--the most promising candidate;
- articulation of an implementation schedule and requirements so as to enable adequate planning;
- collection of data and feedback as necessary for monitoring implementation and measuring results;
- specification of desired outcome criteria and time lines for their attainment;
- public documentation of the effort, including implementation conditions and outcomes, so as to share lessons learned with other systems.

Research on Interventions

Effectiveness of Preschool Interventions

Findings: Increasingly, children at risk of experiencing difficulties in learning to read can be identified with a fair degree of accuracy several years prior to schooling. In complement, there is need for more rigorous and long-term research on how to assist such children most powerfully and efficiently. Although research affirms that some early language and literacy intervention programs have produced substantial and long-term benefits, many other such attempts have not. The more and less effective attributes of such programs cannot be adequately identified on the basis of existing data.

Recommendations: Toward developing more efficient and effective programs of early intervention, appropriate government agencies and private foundations are urged to:

- coordinate early screening and intervention research so as to identify causal difficulties and their most effective redress;
- recognize and study the systemic nature of organizational structures in order to offer useful interventions at the preschool level with ties to family, communities, cultural groups, etc.;

- evaluate how promising interventions can be delivered and sustained with greatest efficacy through Head Start programs, home-based programs, day care centers, software, television, and other media and social institutions;
- sponsor long-term prospective studies of early intervention strategies to assess the impact and longevity of different intervention strategies and their components and to determine how those factors interact with later instruction and experience, in school and out.

Reading Among Children for Whom English Is the Second Language

Findings: The large and growing number of children for whom English is a second language has thrust upon the educational community--practitioners no less than researchers--extremely important questions and challenges not traditionally addressed within the domain of reading science. By far the most controversial of these is whether it is more desirable to promote literacy in a first or second language for limited-English-speaking children. Although far from conclusive, there is evidence that initial reading instruction in a child's home language (e.g., Spanish) makes a positive contribution to literacy attainment (both in the home language and in English) and, presumably, to the prevention of reading difficulties. The question of how best to promote literacy learning in either or both languages is just as important but overshadowed by the politically more volatile issues of which language should be used and for how long. Researchers and educators possess scant empirical guidance on how best to design literacy instruction for such children in either their primary language or English, much less in both.

Recommendations: Appropriate government agencies and private foundations are urged to sponsor research on the factors that influence the literacy acquisition of children for whom English is not the primary language. For various primary languages (e.g., Spanish, Khmer, Chinese) and along key language dimensions such as alphabetic and nonalphabetic writing systems and traditionally literate versus nonliterate languages, issues that need to be addressed include:

- What are the principal difficulties involved in literacy acquisition in the primary language? What methods of primary language reading instruction are effective?
- What can we learn from successful reading instruction practices in countries where the children's primary language is not written? To what extent are these practices applicable in a North American context?
- In what ways might successful methods for teaching primary language literacy be adjusted to anticipate English language literacy acquisition and facilitate the transition to successful English literacy?
- How does the timing of the transition to English influence literacy prospects in each language? What are the optimal instructional strategies for such programs and how do they differ as a function of when the transition is introduced? Once a child makes a transition to English literacy, what are the advantages and disadvantages of continuing primary language academic instruction?
- Are there threshold levels of oral English proficiency and primary language literacy that are required for successful transition to, and satisfactory achievement in, English literacy? If so, are there adequate instruments for assessing these levels?
- How do similarities and differences in the syntax, semantics, phonology, and orthography of the first language ease or impede the challenge of learning to read in English? What are the instructional implications of these similarities and differences?
- To what extent should absolute level of oral English proficiency and relative proficiency in English and the primary language determine whether a limited-English-proficient child receives beginning and early literacy instruction in English?
- Where initial reading instruction is provided only in English, what are the best instructional

strategies for developing literacy in English?

- What are the long-term literacy consequences of being taught to read only in a second language (i.e., English)?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning to read in two languages? In particular, what are the cognitive costs and benefits? Is there an optimal timing and sequencing of instruction?
- Can children learn to read in two languages simultaneously, just as they can learn to speak in two or more languages simultaneously? What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning to read in two languages simultaneously?
- How do cultural issues in how text is used and regarded overlap with linguistic issues among children for whom English is a second language?

Role of Dialect in Reading Achievement

Findings: Although it has long been suggested that the dialect features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and its phonology create additional challenges for learning to read English, few efforts to test this hypothesis have been undertaken directly. Demonstration studies of linguistically informed instructional programs for African American youth have yielded promising results, but more analytic and longer-term research is required to gauge these benefits and to understand the factors on which they depend.

Recommendations: Studies of the long-term effects of linguistically informed instructional programs on literacy outcomes for speakers of AAVE could include:

- modifications of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction that are sensitive to differences in the phonological characteristics of AAVE and those presumed by English orthography;
- exploration of morphemic and word analysis strategies for reinforcing the structure and significance of English orthography; and
- research on the role of other linguistic factors, such as syntax, in the reading acquisition of AAVE speakers.

Role of Retention and Extra-Year Programs

Findings: Despite mixed research support, schools continue to offer as potential solutions the retention of specific children in a given grade or providing classes of "extra-year" preparation prior to kindergarten or between kindergarten and first grade for groups of children deemed to be at risk. However, there is some evidence to indicate that extra instructional support rather than just the extended time makes a difference in reading outcomes for students who are retained in the primary grades. It is unclear whether delivering the extra support during the first year could be more effective than offering it the second time around. Furthermore, the differences are not clear between the children who thrive in the long run after an extra year and those who do not.

Information is needed about the nature of the specific interventions for literacy available to children in extra-year programs. More sophisticated research is needed to specify common factors, if any, that are found for children who are successful following retention or an extra-year program.

Recommendations: Appropriate government agencies and private foundations should increase research efforts on the role of retention and extra-year programs in the prevention of reading difficulties. Research should be addressed specifically to the provision for appropriate reading instruction and outcomes. Studies of the long-term effects on literacy outcomes from curriculum variations could address the following questions:

- Can we make screening measures sensitive enough to identify children who would benefit from these types of programs?
- Does one type of program work better than another (e.g., outcomes at the end of first grade for children attending transitional K-1 programs versus those who are retained in kindergarten for an additional year)?
- What are the types of literacy instruction offered by such programs and how do they provide for the needed literacy growth of individual children?
- What evidence is there that children given such additional time or instruction profit more than they would have by proceeding with their age-level peers?

Software Focused on Literacy

Findings: Preliminary evaluations indicate that well-designed software programs for supporting early literacy development can produce gains in student performance. Such software can reinforce, motivate, and extend early literacy instruction.

Recommendations: Appropriate government agencies and private foundations should increase research efforts addressing appropriate technology that can support reading instruction. Issues that need to be addressed are whether the software programs are:

- consistent with the recommendations made above for "Reading Instruction in Kindergarten Through Third Grade,"
- consistent with classroom curricular goals as well as the specific needs of individual children, and
- used as a complement to--not as a substitute for--effective teaching or a good curriculum.

Effectiveness of Primary-Grade Interventions

Findings: Research affirms that quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure. Indeed, when done well, classroom instruction has been shown to overwhelm the effects of student background and supplementary tutoring. Although research has made great strides in identifying the attributes of effective classroom instruction, many questions have been inadequately addressed.

Recommendations: Toward improving reading outcomes for all children, research toward increasing the efficacy of classroom reading instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades should be the number one funding priority. Beyond issues addressed in other sections of this chapter, questions in need of answers include:

- How best can the development of decoding automaticity be hastened?
- What factors govern children's induction and generalization of spelling-sound knowledge and how can they best be fostered?
- What are the roles and dynamics of syntactic and semantic factors in beginning readers? How do they influence the growth of decoding and fluency?
- Through what means can word recognition and comprehension development be coordinated so that they develop most efficiently and synergistically?
- What kinds of reading and writing activities and instruction serve to maximize the leverage of each on the other?

- How do syntactic competence and awareness influence reading growth? What aspects of syntax warrant instruction?
- What are the best strategies for building vocabulary growth?
- What are the keys to improving content-area reading?
- Can spelling and vocabulary growth be accelerated by learning about derivational morphology and, toward that end, what are the best strategies for its instruction?
- What kinds of instructional practices and activities serve best to develop children's habits of self-monitoring for coherence and comprehension?
- What is the impact of early childhood and primary-grade instructional practices on reading and literacy growth in the middle and upper grades of school? How should the curriculum be changed to maximize such benefit?
- What is the actual incidence and nature of the "fourth-grade slump"? Its prevalence and presenting symptoms should be documented and, if so indicated, research on its underlying causes and best prevention should follow.
- What kinds of curriculum materials (including basal readers) are useful for what purposes, and how can published materials and the reading/writing curriculum be integrated?
- What kinds of knowledge and material support do classroom teachers need for greatest effectiveness?
- How can in-service opportunities be used most effectively?
- What are the best strategies for monitoring and managing the range of student progress and difficulties in any given classroom or building?
- What kinds of classroom, grouping, and staffing options would significantly improve instructional delivery in the primary grades?
- What are the best strategies for maintaining constructive communication and collaboration between parents and teachers in support of children's reading development?

Notes

¹Sublexical means concerning the phonological and morphological components of words, such as the sounds of individual and groups of letters.

²Orthographic means features of the writing system, particularly letters and their sequences in words.

³ Primary prevention is concerned with reducing the number of new cases (incidence) of an identified condition or problem in the population. Secondary prevention is concerned with reducing the number of existing cases (prevalence) of an identified condition or problem in the population.

⁴ Concepts of print are a set of understandings about the conventions of literacy, e.g., directionality, intentionality, stability, use of blank spaces and letters, and multiple genres and uses.

⁵ Phonological awareness means sensitivity to the fact that there are patterns of spoken language that recur and can be manipulated without respect to the meaning that the language patterns ordinarily convey.

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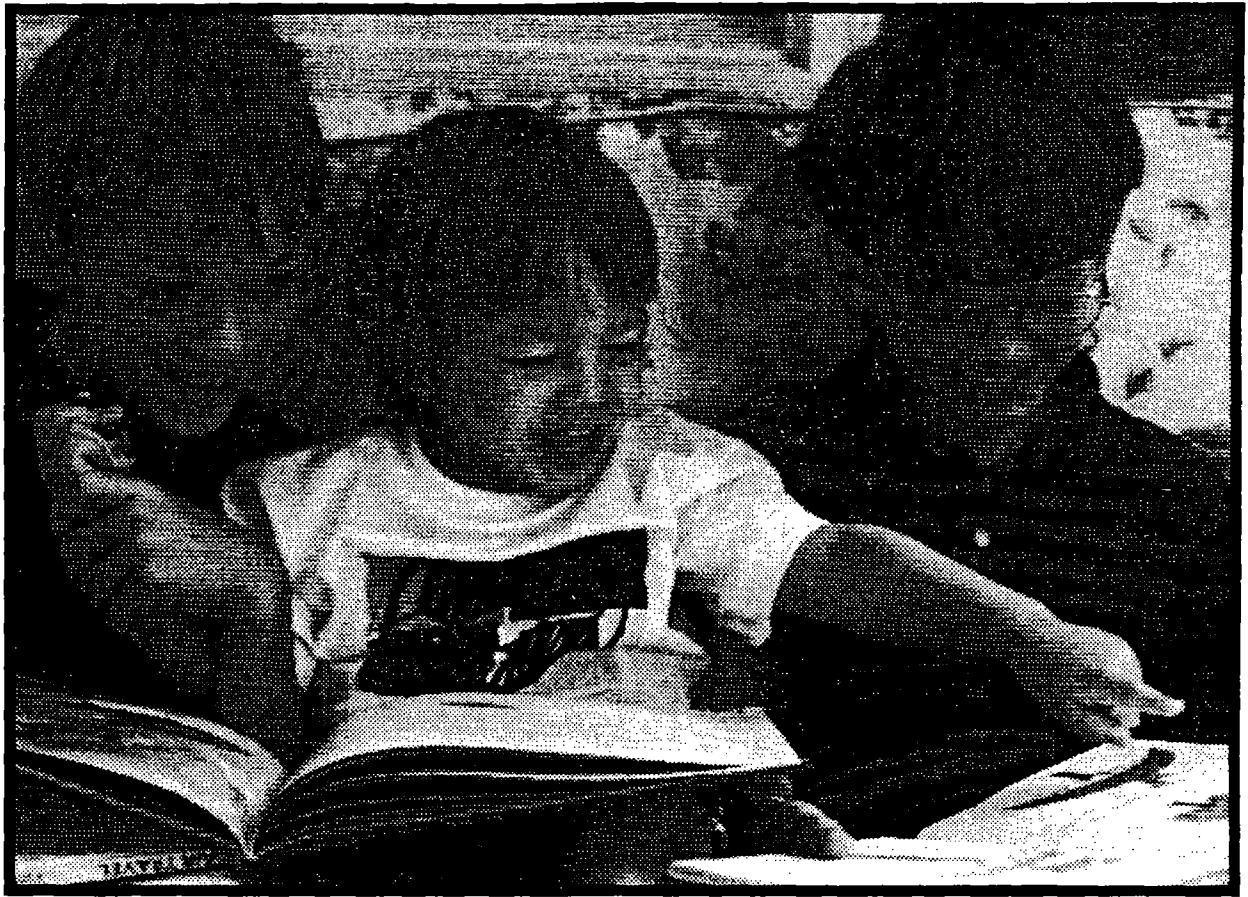
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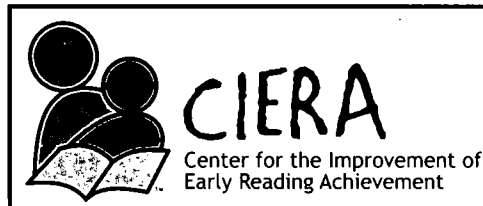
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Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children

10 Research-Based Principles

1. Home language and literacy experiences that lead to the development of key print concepts are plentiful among children who enter school prepared to learn to read. Joint book reading with family members helps children develop a wide range of knowledge that supports them in school-based reading. Once students are in school, parental help in the form of modeling good reading habits and monitoring homework and television viewing is associated with gains in student achievement. Programs that assist families in initiating and sustaining these sorts of activities show positive benefits for children's reading achievement.

2. Preschool programs are particularly beneficial for children who do not experience informal learning opportunities in their homes. These preschool experiences include opportunities to listen to and examine books, say nursery rhymes, write messages, and see and talk about print. Such preschool experiences lead to improved reading achievement in the school years, with some effects proving durable through grade 3.

3. Skills that predict later reading success can be promoted through a variety of classroom language and meaningful reading and writing events in kindergarten and grade 1. The two most powerful of these predictors are letter-name knowledge and phonemic awareness (the conscious awareness of the sounds in *spoken* words). Instruction that promotes phonemic awareness engages children in hearing and blending sounds. Activities that promote this attention to sounds can be motivating and playful for young children, including oral renditions of rhymes, poems, and songs, as well as writing their own journals and messages. Such instruction has demonstrated positive effects on primary-grade reading achievement, especially when it is coupled with letter-sound instruction.

4. Primary-level instruction that supports successful reading acquisition is consistent, well-designed, and focused. Teachers lead lessons where children receive systematic word recognition instruction on common, consistent letter-sound relationships and important but often unpredictable high-frequency words, such as *the* and *what*. Teachers ensure that children become adept at monitoring the accuracy of their reading as well their understanding of texts through instruction in strategies such as predicting, inferencing, clarifying misunderstandings, and summarizing. Instructional activities that promote growth in word recognition and comprehension include repeated reading of text, guided reading and writing, strategy lessons, reading aloud with feedback, and conversations about texts children have read.

5. Primary-level classroom environments in successful schools provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in teacher-guided instruction to everyday reading and writing. In these classrooms, teachers read books aloud and hold follow-up discussions, children read independently every day, and children write stories and keep journals. These events are monitored frequently by teachers, ensuring that time is well spent and that children receive feedback on their efforts. Teachers design these events carefully, using information from ongoing assessment of children's strengths and needs as the primary basis for new activities.

6. Cultural and linguistic diversity among America's children reflects the variations within the communities and homes in which they live and is manifest in differences in their dispositions toward and knowledge about topics, language, and literacy. Effective instruction includes assessment, integration, and extension of relevant background knowledge and the use of texts that recognize these diverse backgrounds. The language of children's homes is especially critical for schools to build on when children are learning to speak, listen to, write, and read English. There is considerable evidence that the linguistic and orthographic knowledge students acquire in speaking and reading their first language predicts and transfers to learning to read a second language. When teachers capitalize on the advantages of bilingualism or biliteracy, second language reading acquisition is significantly enhanced.

7. Children who are identified as having reading disabilities benefit from systematic instruction, but not at the cost of opportunities to engage in meaningful reading and writing. These children profit from the same sort of well-balanced instructional programs that benefit all children who are learning to read and write. Programs are characterized by intensive one-on-one or small-group instruction, attention to both comprehension and word recognition processes, thoroughly individualized assessment and instructional planning, and extensive experiences with an array of texts.

8. Proficient reading in third grade and above is sustained and enhanced by programs that adhere to four fundamental features: (1) deep and wide opportunities to read, (2) the acquisition of new knowledge and vocabulary, partially through wide reading but also through explicit attention to acquiring networks of new concepts through instruction, (3) an emphasis on the influence that the kinds of text (e.g., stories versus essays) and the ways writers organize particular texts has on understanding, and (4) explicit attention to assisting students in reasoning about text.

9. Professional opportunities to improve reading achievement are prominent in successful schools and programs. These opportunities allow teachers and administrators to analyze instruction, assessment, and achievement, to set goals for improvement, to learn about effective practices, and to participate in on-going communities in which participants deliberately try to understand both successes and persistent problems.

10. Entire school communities, not just first-grade teachers, are involved in bringing children to high levels of achievement. In successful schools, goals for reading achievement are clearly stated, high expectations for children's attainment of these goals are shared with all participants, instructional means for attaining these goals are articulated, and shared assessments are used to monitor children's progress. Instructional programs in successful schools may have many different components, including a range of materials and technology, but they maintain a focus on reading and writing. Successful programs extend into the home by involving parents in their children's reading and homework. Community partnerships, including volunteer tutoring programs, are common in such schools.

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