



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Topic: Early Reading Instruction

Learning to read poses real challenges for many children, even those who will eventually become competent readers. This means early and effective reading instruction should be the hallmark of all primary schools. Research has clearly demonstrated what can and must be done to improve the reading proficiency of all children. This bulletin provides an overview of this research and provides classroom implications for teaching reading.

Literature Reviews

Every Child Reading: An Action Plan of the Learning First Alliance **Learning First Alliance, June 1998. Available online at** **www.learningfirst.org/readingaction.html**

The Learning First Alliance, an organization of 12 major education associations, prepared this white paper on reading practices based on strong research findings. While this group represented a wide spectrum of views, agreement of the following strategies for achieving the goal of every child reading was reached:

1. Educational decisions must be based on evidence, not ideology.
2. Textbooks should be adopted on the same evidence.
3. Professional development is necessary and needs to be ongoing.
4. Whole school adoption of effective methods and practices provides a common focus and the extensive assistance needed.
5. Parents should be involved in supporting reading instruction.
6. Preservice education and instruction needs to be improved to focus on effective instruction.
7. All staff are needed to promote effective reading instruction.
8. Early identification and intervention is needed based on diagnostic assessments.
9. Accountability measures are needed in early grades.
10. Reading research should be intensified and should be used to improve what we do know.

Grossen, B. (1997). A synthesis of research on reading from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Available online at **www.nrrf.org/synthesis_research.htm**

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has released a list of effective reading instruction principles based on a review of numerous scientifically rigorous, multidisciplinary, longitudinal and replicable research investigations. These six principles are:

1. Begin teaching phonemic awareness directly at an early age.
2. Teach each sound-spelling correspondence explicitly.
3. Teach frequent, highly regular sound-spelling relationships systematically.
4. Show children exactly how to sound out words.
5. Use connected, decodable text to help children to practice the sound-spelling relationships they learn.
6. Use interesting stories to develop language comprehension.

Research demonstrated that lack of phonemic awareness is a major obstacle to reading acquisition. Children who lack this awareness cannot segment words into syllables and phonemes and consequently are unable to decode single words accurately and fluently. Additionally, the research demonstrates that reading is not developmental or natural, but learned. These findings contradict the notion that children will learn to read when they are "ready." The concept of developmentally appropriate must never be used to delay instruction or intervention; instead it should be used to provide appropriate instructional strategies at early ages.

Classroom Implications

- All elementary teachers need meaningful, ongoing professional development to ensure that they know how to teach reading and can implement well-designed reading programs, which lead to the desired results.
- Use diagnostic assessments to identify effective interventions early and ongoing in a child's school career.
- The entire building-based staff of the elementary school needs to be involved to reform early reading instruction; a one-person-at-a-time approach is insufficient to implement the vast changes needed to prevent early reading failure.
- Begin direct and explicit teaching of phonemic awareness at an early age and include tasks such as rhyming, auditory discrimination exercises, word-to-word matching, and sound and phoneme exercises.
- Explicit teaching of sound-spelling correspondence is essential.
- The use of connected, decodable text for children to practice the sound-syllable correspondence is necessary.
- Early identification and intervention, as part of the general education program, are imperative to promoting reading success in all children.
- Reading is a skill that must be intentionally taught; it does not develop naturally.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, eds;
Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council. Available online at
www.nap.edu/html/prdyc

This report, developed by a committee of reading researchers, synthesized the research on early reading development in order to advance substantially agreed upon results and conclusions. The committee's recommendations extend to all children, although they focus heavily on children at-risk for learning to read. The report provides an overview of the process of learning to read, explains and details who has reading difficulties, informs educators and parents on how to prevent and intervene with children who are having reading difficulties, and provides clear, concise recommendations for practice. Reading instruction should be the focus of instruction in every primary grade classroom and should focus on the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, mapping speech sounds to parts of words, achieving fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

- Children who are at-risk for reading difficulties should be identified as early as possible to receive the intensive intervention needed to support language and reading development. Deferring intervention should be avoided at all costs.
- Teachers need ongoing staff development in order to provide effective reading instruction. This should begin during teacher preparation and continue throughout careers, especially during early entry into the profession.
- Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends heavily on word recognition and fluency, frequent assessment linked to effective instructional response is required.
- Intensive intervention must be provided immediately. This may mean a change in the instructional program if the child was not achieving success in the classroom program.

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