

Summary of the Research Basis for Beginning Reading

By Laura Stewart

Assumptions and practices not supported by research	Conclusions and practices supported by research
Reading ability will occur in a normal progression of human development; therefore what reading programs must do is immerse children in literacy-based activities.	Reading is not an innate skill. Students must master a hierarchy of skills to become proficient readers.
Reading is developmental; many children who are not learning to read are just “not ready.”	With appropriate instruction, all but a small percentage (4–6%) of children can learn to read. Early scientifically-based instruction prevents the “wait to fail” syndrome.
Making reading fun is all that is needed to motivate a beginning reader.	Motivation is a product of interest and success; young learners must first and foremost be successful at what they are learning. You cannot love what you cannot do.
Beginning word recognition is taught through memorization, picture cues, and contextual guessing, often times referred to as the “three cueing systems.”	Beginning word recognition is taught through phonemic decoding.
Phonemic awareness is taught implicitly.	Phonemic awareness is taught systematically and explicitly.
Understanding the alphabetic code comes naturally through interaction with text, and there is no need to teach it in any direct way. Phonics is taught implicitly through the opportunities presented in text.	The alphabetic code is best taught through systematic and explicit phonics instruction.
The focus of reading instruction is on meaning-based activities; direct instruction in phonics is meaningless drill.	Mastery of the alphabetic code is the fundamental “gateway skill” necessary for constructing meaning. Children apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text.
Reading material for beginning readers includes both predictable text and leveled text with uncontrolled vocabulary, leading to a reliance on picture cues and contextual guessing.	Reading material for beginning readers includes decodable text in which at least 95% of the words can be independently decoded based on prior instruction.
Multiple word attack strategies should be taught simultaneously.	Beginning readers are taught to decode words as their first word attack strategy. Multiple decoding opportunities are necessary to create a neural model integrating pronunciation, spelling, and meaning.
Beginning readers should be taught a large number of sight words.	In the beginning stages, students learn a small number of non-decodable sight words, but the number is deliberately limited, in order to build the decoding habit.

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All students read along with the teacher or with other students before opportunities to read on their own.	Students read orally and independently so teachers can monitor their abilities and provide appropriate instruction.
In their expressive writing, beginning writers are encouraged to use only “invented spelling.”	Spelling is taught directly and simultaneously with reading. Students are deliberately taught to encode as they are taught to decode. Students are purposefully taught common spelling patterns. Students are taught to read and spell high-frequency non-decodable words. “Phonics-based spelling” is appropriate while children are acquiring these systematically-taught skills.
Expressing oneself through writing is paramount. Students’ handwriting skills are not that important.	Letter formation instruction and practice are critical in learning all the letter attributes foundational to the alphabetic principle. In addition, poor handwriting and spelling interfere with writing fluency and hence writing quality.
Early comprehension should focus on teaching strategies.	Comprehension instruction for beginning reading focuses on developing automaticity in word recognition, language, background, and listening comprehension. As students acquire automaticity, brain energy can be shifted to comprehending text. At that point, comprehension instruction shifts to strategy instruction, dependent on the structure of the text and the purpose for reading.
Teachers have individual autonomy in creating their own reading program.	Teachers use a core, comprehensive, research-based reading curriculum which has proven results.
Teachers are not accountable for specific research-based teaching practices.	Administrators monitor classroom implementation and provide resources and assistance to teachers in faithful implementation of a research-based curriculum.
Teachers are free to pursue any and all reading initiatives.	There is a focused, building-wide commitment to research-based reading instruction, led by a knowledgeable administrator. Teachers are provided with high-quality professional development focused on proven best practices.