

## **A Time for Action Research about Reading Instruction**

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Over the past century, there have been tens of thousands of research studies on how reading should be taught, including the elements of instruction required to produce proficient readers. In 1967 Harvard Professor Jeanne Chall reviewed all of the published studies on reading instruction from the beginning of the 20th Century and concluded that there was NO support for the sight word memory approach.

The overwhelming conclusion from research at that point was that explicit, systematic phonics instruction produced proficient readers. Sight word instruction did not. Despite those findings, nothing changed in the education industry. Publishers continued to produce textbooks that ignored the research.

In 2000, The Report of the National Reading Panel reviewed more than 100,000 studies on reading instruction. That report was distributed to schools nationwide. The conclusion was the same as what Dr. Jeanne Chall had discovered more than three decades earlier. Billions of federal tax dollars were provided to all 50 states to adopt the research findings of the NRP, but the education community still adamantly refused to change what they “believed” to be true”.

According to the Teacher Prep Report from the National Council on Education Quality (2013), colleges of education are woefully deficient in the preparation of prospective teachers on how to teach children to read. Thus, new teachers are influenced by those who have been using harmful instructional practices for a generation or more, and are saddled with textbooks adopted by school administrators who willfully and knowingly spend billions of dollars each year on failed instructional materials that perpetuate illiteracy rather than cure it.

Trusting parents send their children off to school each year fully expecting ALL of them to be taught to read by the end of first grade at the latest, only to be dismayed when that does not happen. National Statistics, year after year after year have indicated that fully one third of students cannot read proficiently at grade level by the end of third grade. The cumulative effect of that over the past several generations, according to the [www.nrrf.org](http://www.nrrf.org), [info@nrrf.org](mailto:info@nrrf.org), PO Box 560, Strasburg, VA 22657, 913-788-6773

One National Adult Literacy Survey, is that one half of the Adult population in America either can't read at all, or are only “functionally literate.” The cost to the economy and to society is staggering. And, it is totally unnecessary. Common Core will not fix it. More federal dollars will not reduce the number of illiterates. Smaller class size won't do it either. Even having “great teachers” in every classroom, or “school choice” will not change the annual statistics either. It will only happen when the American public awakes to the reality that they have been defrauded for generations because disproven methods of teaching their children to read continue to be used in all but a small percentage of classrooms in America. And so, the beat goes on.

From 2000 to the present research has focused on how the brain is affected by reading instruction. Again, the conclusions drawn from these studies cement the findings of earlier scientific research on reading. There is NO support, NONE, for teaching children sight words, asking them to memorize hundreds of words by the “shape of the word” or “reading” books with limited vocabulary over and over and over again with the hope of stimulating the brain to figure out the alphabetic code and apply it.

The sad truth is this. NOT ONE EMPIRICAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH STUDY on reading instruction over more than a century has concluded that memorizing words is the best or most effective way to learn to read English. As eminent reading researcher Keith Stanovich, in his book “Progress in Understanding Reading: Scientific Foundations and New Frontiers, (2000) concluded: “That direct instruction in alphabetic coding facilitates early reading acquisition is one of the most well established

conclusions in all of behavioral science. Conversely, the idea that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community.”

Stanislas Dehaene states unequivocally in “Reading and the Brain: The New Science of How We Read” (2009) that: “The whole language approach has been officially abandoned. Nonetheless, I suspect that the issue is still alive in many a teacher’s mind because whole language advocates are still firmly entrenched in their position. In France as as the United States, efforts to reconcile the two camps have led to the adoption of an unhealthy compromise called ‘mixed’ or ‘balanced reading’ instruction.”

There are those who advocate that we need even MORE studies. And, no doubt there will be many. However, there must come a time when practitioners, teachers, parents and the general public say STOP!!!! Enough already!!! The English language has not changed, other than adding new words to our vocabulary. Our brains have not changed. We have the capacity to learn skills like reading, and we have centuries of readers to prove it.

Here is a question for you. Do we continue to conduct research studies to PROVE that if you toss a rock off a cliff it might go UP, or sideways???? No of course not. We KNOW that gravity will pull that rock downward, NEVER upward or sideways. It is a “law of nature.” The staggering volume of studies on how children and adults learn to read is overwhelming...and there are “0” quantitative research studies that demonstrate or prove that a sight memory approach is more effective than learning the alphabetic code, early and completely.

As author and scholar Sam Blumenfeld eloquently states in Phonics for Success, (2014):“We must not forget that the invention of the alphabet is based on one of man’s greatest discoveries: That all of spoken language is composed of a relatively small number of different, irreducible speech sounds. In English it is 44.

The greatest works of the ancient world have come down to us through alphabetic writing: The Iliad, the Odyssey, the Greek dramas, the Bible. Without the alphabet, man’s intellectual and spiritual development would have been seriously retarded. So, we must regard the alphabet with great awe and respect. It is civilization’s prize possession.”

The 20th Century studies on reading instruction have settled the matter of how we learn to read proficiently. That is simply a fact. It is “a law of nature.” It is time to implement what we know and roll back the unnecessary experimentation on our children. Teach them to read using the tools available to all teachers in the 21st Century. The reading wars are over. Let us join together to make America the most literate nation on earth.

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