

Reading K – 8

The National Reading Panel's reading report was published at the request of the 1997 Congress, who charged the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education to conduct an extensive review of the scientific research that had been done on the teaching of reading. The goal was to determine how children learn to read and what approaches to reading were the most effective. The panel was made up of people from various disciplines, and the data included in the study underwent rigorous scrutiny. Five different areas of reading were examined. They are: Alphabeticity, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary Comprehension, and Reading Comprehension Strategies.

- 1) Alphabeticity – The studies identified phonemic awareness (the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes or sounds in spoken words) and letter knowledge as the two “best school predictors” of student reading success in the early primary grades. Phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics, because no printed word is seen. It refers to the auditory and verbal manipulation of sounds, such as rhyming, phoneme isolation (recognizing individual sounds such as the first sound in a word) and phoneme identify (recognizing items that begin with the same sound).

What parents can do:

- Read books rich in rhythm and rhyme, such as Dr. Seuss books. These books will help children make predictions of what the next word is based on rhymes.
- Play word games such as “I Spy”. This can even be played in the car. “I spy something beginning with the /b/ sound.”
- Start a sound notebook – cutting out and pasting pictures of things that begin with a certain sound.
- Have upper and/or lower case letters on your refrigerator.
- Write letters in the bathtub using foam soaps.

2) Phonics - Phonics is the process of converting letters to sounds so that words can be accurately decoded (blended) into real words. A quality phonics program will have a “planned, sequential set of phonetic elements taught explicitly or systematically”.

The National Reading Panel determined that when phonics is taught explicitly in the early grades, particularly in kindergarten and first grade, it has a significant positive impact on acquired reading skills, including reading comprehension. At LAS, we have adopted the FOUNDATIONS curriculum, created by Wilson Language Training. It is a K through 3 phonics program that focuses significantly on the application of phonics in reading and writing.

What parents can do:

- When reading with your child, encourage the tapping of decodable words as a key strategy to reading unknown words.
- Assist children with their Foundations homework.

- For older students, encourage spelling and decoding by chunking words into syllables and then applying learned phonetic strategies from there.

3) Fluency - Fluency means the ability to read with the proper speed, accuracy, and expression. While being able to recognize words is an important early reading skill, fluency is not the immediate result of word recognition proficiency. Research showed that repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance leads to meaningful improvement in reading expertise for both good readers and those experiencing difficulties.

The Literacy Dictionary (Harris and Hodges 1995), defines fluency as “the freedom from Word identification problems that might hinder comprehension”. Automaticity is the “fluent processing of information that requires little effort or attention.” The goal of fluency is to create a fast and effortless process, so children can direct their attention to the comprehension elements of reading rather than on the word skills process.

The Matthew Effect – The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. In other words, the students who need the most practice in reading spend the least amount of time in actual reading practice.

What parents can do:

- Oral reading with feedback is the most effective way to improve reading fluency. In other words, read with your child and provide guidance when words are misread. This feedback should include statements such as, “Does that make sense?” or “Can you tap out that word?” Frequent praise is always important.
- Re-reading for improved expression is also a great strategy.
- NOTE: Research has shown that silent reading does not have the same impact on a child’s reading ability as oral reading with feedback. Therefore, having your child read aloud to you is key.

4) Comprehension: Vocabulary Instruction – Probably one of the most important skills coming into kindergarten is receptive and expressive vocabulary. The number of words a child knows BEFORE reading puts them at a significant advantage as they begin school. Once in school, the continued exposure to rich language and vocabulary is key to continued reading and academic success. The review of research indicated the following:

- Children need direct instruction of vocabulary
- Children need repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary
- Learning in rich contexts is valuable
- Vocabulary instruction can’t rely on one single method
- Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning (learning vocab when vocab is not the goal)

What parents can do:

- Have your child take an active part during storybook reading. When you are reading at night, ask questions, define words, allow your child to ask questions, etc. An interactive reading experience benefits vocabulary as well as

comprehension. At the same time, it models appropriate fluency and shares a love and respect for reading.

- Repeated reading of a story provides multiple exposures to rich vocabulary. Don't be fooled by picture books. They are often very rich in language and unique vocabulary that help to create images and build expressive and receptive language.
- Every aspect of life is rich with vocabulary. Whether you are going on a vacation or a day-cation, introduce vocabulary that relates to your activity into your conversations with your children.

5) Comprehension Instruction:

Research found that several strategies of instruction help students to improve their overall reading comprehension ability. These include graphic organizers or semantic mapping, focus on story structure (elements of a story), question answering, question generation, visualization, and summarization.

What parents can do:

- Bring young children to the local library for storytime. These formats create an interactive environment for children to exchange ideas about books and to learn reading strategies in a relaxed format from an early age.
- Encourage participation in book groups (also available at the library) for older students. The library book groups will focus on a book chosen for the whole group to read, and then children gather to share and discuss, question etc.
- As children get older, parallel reading is effective. This means you are reading the same book as your older child, at a different place and time. Then you initiate conversations about story elements, motives, descriptions and language used in the book. This is a great strategy for overall reading comprehension as well as vocabulary building.
- I often tell students that every story, even a cartoon episode or a TV show, follows a set story structure. All good stories have characters, setting, problems (conflicts), events, climaxes and resolution. Characters have motives and children can make predictions or inferences about what is going on. Even if you are not reading a book, these discussions about story elements in visual media will enhance your child's critical thinking skills, which are so important for real reading situations.
- Help your child to visualize what is going on in a story. Encourage them to discuss how they picture certain characters or action in the story. Responses can be in theatrical play or in art expression as well as in verbal retelling.