

## Read Right's View on the Five Basic Skills as Defined by the National Reading Panel

In 1997, the Federal Government responded to the reality of far too many adults, teens, and children being unable to comfortably and easily get information from print by convening a National Reading Panel charged with conducting a review of research to discover the best way to instruct reading. The panel's final report was published in 2000 and became the basis for the No Child Left Behind legislation which made federal funding for reading dependent on whether the district followed the dictates of the panel.

The report advocated:

1. Explicit instruction in phonemic awareness (the concept that words in spoken language are composed of individual phonemes, or sounds)
2. Systematic instruction in figuring out what the words are (using decoding, word-attack, and sight word recognition)
3. Employing methods to improve fluency (typically, by asking students to read as fast as possible and timing their words per minute)
4. Instruction designed to improve vocabulary
5. Improving comprehension by teaching specific strategies and by asking pertinent questions

Read Right constitutes a paradigm shift in the field of reading. As such, it is not surprising that our views about "basic skills" differ from that of the National Reading Panel.

### 1. Explicit Instruction in Phonemic Awareness

If children didn't have phonemic awareness when they walked through the kindergarten door, they couldn't talk. Think about it. If my brain doesn't know that words in spoken language are composed of individual phonemes, how could it make talking happen? It simply could not.

Much of what our brains know implicitly about language, we do not explicitly (or consciously) know. For example, a phonological rule in English is: Intervocalic X is voiced pre-stress and unvoiced post-stress. If your brain didn't know and use this rule implicitly, it wouldn't know whether to pronounce *exercise* as *eksercise* or *egzercise*.<sup>\*</sup> Does knowing the rule add any competence to your ability to pronounce x-containing words? Of course not.

The real issue relative to phonemic awareness is whether bringing implicit knowledge to an explicit level has a positive effect on a child's becoming an excellent reader. Gerald Coles,<sup>\*\*</sup> in his book, *Misreading Reading The Bad Science that Hurts Children*, states:

"Studies have shown that training in narrow skills, such as phonemic awareness, helps children do better on tests of these and related skills but *does not improve reading comprehension of sentences or stories, or make a difference in later reading achievement.*" (Page xx, italics added)

So, unless that kindergarten or first grade student is planning a career as a linguist, there is no advantage to bringing implicit aspects of language competency to an explicit level.

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<sup>\*</sup>When native English speakers pronounce nonsense words containing x, they follow the rule. This indicates the brain operates from the rule and not merely from parroting what it hears.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Unlike the individual members of the National Reading Panel, Coles read and analyzed every research study cited in the Panel's Final Report.

## 2. Systematic Instruction in Figuring Out What the Words Are

Reading professionals for 150 years have maintained that the brain reads by looking at the squiggles on the page; using decoding, word attack; and sight-word recognition to translate those squiggles to oral language; and then going through the language to get to the meaning.

Most would agree that reading isn't that simple, but most would also agree with Marilyn J. Adams as expressed in her book, *Beginning to Read* (published in 1990), "Skillful reading is not a unitary skill. It is a whole complex system of skills and knowledge. . . *On the other hand, unless the processes involved in individual word recognition operate properly, nothing else in the system can either.*" (italics added)

Read Right methodology reflects a different view. (See page 4.)

## 3. Employing Methods to Improve Fluency

Read Right's view on fluency differs dramatically from that proposed by the field of reading in general. The rest of the reading world looks at fluency as a reading skill that must be acquired and can be instructed. This is most commonly accomplished through timed readings in which the student is told to read as fast as he can. The number of words read per minute is calculated and often charted, and a goal is established for the student to continuously increase the number of words read per minute until he is able to read fluently.

Read Right does not view fluency as a reading skill. Rather, we view lack of fluency as a *symptom* of a reading problem. If the brain is not correctly doing the basic process of reading, oral reading *will not be* fluent. If the brain is correctly doing the basic process of reading, oral reading *will be* fluent.

Let's imagine that you have a bacterial infection. A fever emerges as one symptom of the infection, and it goes so high that your loved ones call the doctor. She says that convulsions are a possibility and it is imperative to bring the fever down immediately. You take a couple of aspirin and reluctantly climb into an ice bath. Your temperature drops, and you feel better. The *symptom* has been treated, but nothing has been done to treat the underlying cause of the high temperature, and if you are not administered antibiotics or your natural immune processes can't handle the bacterial infection, the symptom will return.

Instructing a student to read faster is an attempt to treat the symptom of the reading problem. It may result in faster reading, but it will not result in natural, fluent reading, and it will do nothing to cause the brain to remodel the neural network that is incorrectly guiding the reading process, which is the underlying cause of the reading problem and the reason for the symptom to emerge in the first place. Encouraging a student to 'push for speed' will create unnaturally rushed, effortful reading, which is, itself, a symptom of a reading problem.

Once a student eliminates his reading problem through participation in Read Right *all* symptoms of the reading problem will disappear—including lack of fluency.

#### 4. Instruction Designed to Improve Vocabulary

The natural way the brain learns vocabulary is to be submerged in comprehensible language—either through reading or listening. The concept of comprehensible is this: the learner knows enough of the language for the communication to be generally comprehensible, but there is some of the vocabulary he does not know. This positions him to go through the part he does know to "get at" the part he doesn't. In short, both ELL and native English speakers can learn vocabulary by reading and listening in environments where they are "getting" the main thrust of the communication but they don't know all of the vocabulary used by the author or the speaker.

The task for the Read Right tutor with every student—both ELL and native English speaker—is to ensure that the input is comprehensible. Tutors need to train their students to demand that the text makes sense. If they don't understand enough of the language, it can't make sense. Students need to ask for clarification. What they are actually doing is asking the tutor to make the message comprehensible. Tutors also need to be alert to signals that the text isn't making sense because of unknown vocabulary and must proactively intervene to make the text comprehensible.

People who read a lot have larger vocabularies than people who don't. This is because readers have more opportunity to encounter vocabulary they don't already know than those who choose not to read, and if the author's message is comprehensible in spite of the fact the reader doesn't know all the vocabulary, then the brain begins to effortlessly, often without even noticing it, acquire the new vocabulary.

**Eliminating a reading problem is the shortest, most direct route to increasing vocabulary** because elimination of a reading problem almost always results in vastly increased reading, which will automatically increase the likelihood of exposure to unknown vocabulary. Such exposure will inevitably expand the vocabulary of the reader. From this point of view alone, Read Right is a wonderful tool for ensuring vocabulary development.

Note: Keep in mind that knowing vocabulary out of context is not the same as knowing it embedded in meaningful communication. Thus, if vocabulary is assessed by asking the students to identify the meaning of individual words (or even words in a phrase—which is better but still not as authentic as words in a paragraph), you may get a spuriously low impression of his vocabulary knowledge as compared to what the student can do when the language is used in an authentic way.

#### 5. Improving Comprehension by teaching specific strategies and by asking pertinent questions

Proponents of the skills-based view of reading acknowledge that it is not unusual for a student who is very good at decoding and has good fluency to have very poor **comprehension**. Their solution is to explicitly and systematically teach comprehension strategies.

##### **DOES PARTICIPATION IN READ RIGHT® IMPROVE COMPREHENSION?**

Yes, when students are tutored in Read Right, they experience a dramatic improvement in comprehension. Read Right addresses comprehension in the most fundamental way possible.

##### **THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW OF LITERAL COMPREHENSION**

The reading field views word identification as the foundational skill of reading. Students must be able to quickly and accurately identify words so they can "go through" the words to get to the meaning. Thus literal comprehension is said to be mediated through spoken language. Read Right supports a different view.

## THE READ RIGHT VIEW OF LITERAL COMPREHENSION

The brain does not store meaning in language. Meaning is separate from language and is stored chemically. (Language is merely a tool to communicate meaning.) The brain, when reading, does not mediate through spoken language because it doesn't have to. It can attend to meaning directly; the words are somewhat incidental.

The Read Right view is that the foundational piece of reading is anticipating the author's intended meaning. Technically speaking, the task for the brain is to create anticipatory sets\* relative to the meaning intended by the author. Doing so builds a direct, personal connection between the reader and the author that *is the essence* of comprehension. The reader couldn't possibly create anticipatory sets unless he was "trucking" with the meaning, and he couldn't build set #8 if he hadn't already constructed #1 - #7. Thus, **if the brain is reading right (creating anticipatory sets rather than identifying words), literal comprehension is inherent in the process.** You can't swim without getting wet, and you can't read without literal comprehension if the brain is creating anticipatory sets as the foundational reading strategy.

## COMPREHENDING WHEN READING OUT LOUD

Reading out loud is an unnatural act unless you are doing it for performance (in which case, you have opportunity to practice) or for evaluation. The focus of the reader can be drawn away from the meaning and towards the performance, which can result in poor comprehension. Students in Read Right have to read out loud in the Excellent Reading Component so we can hold them accountable to achieve excellence, and they have to read out loud in the Coached Reading Component so we can provide feedback on emerging symptoms. Evaluation of comprehension should occur only from the student's silent reading.

## HIGHER ORDER COMPREHENSION OR CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking, which is sometimes referred to as higher order comprehension, is not a reading skill. The neural network that guides the reading process has finished its work when literal comprehension has occurred. If the reader wants to think critically about the information gained from reading, he must access the neural circuitry built to guide critical thinking operations. He accesses that same neural circuitry when he wants to think critically about information gained from listening, experiencing, or observing. Students tutored in Read Right are also tutored in the Critical Thinking component, which enhances their critical thinking abilities. Older students who have had limited opportunity to develop critical thinking abilities because reading problems precluded their abilities to get the information from the text to think critically about will need "catch up" time and additional assistance from classroom teachers in developing and fine-tuning these important thinking skills.

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\*Anticipatory set: A collection of elements assembled to function as a unit to enable a prediction, or anticipation to occur. In the case of reading, the prediction is relative to the author's intended message.