

Sylvan Learning Center Reading Research

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Every day children enter classrooms to greet teachers who hold well-intentioned plans to give those children the very best education. For developmental readers, children who learn to read normally, there is no question that the content offered will be learned. Some of these readers will look outside of school for supplemental education to enhance their regular education. Unfortunately, many children are unable to learn successfully in normal classrooms due to reading problems or ineffective instruction. Through grade three, children are learning to read; from grade four on, children are reading to learn. At any time over these years, a gap in the foundations of learning to read can make effective reading to learn difficult, if not impossible, the more time passes. In fact, forty-two percent of fourth graders are reading below grade level. (Kame'enui, Adams and Lyon, 2001) This failure develops independent of socioeconomic status, race or gender. The most common problem that pervades this population of disabled readers is the lack of phonemic awareness. (Kame'enui, Adams and Lyon, 2001) The necessity to "catch up" without repeating school years leads many parents to seek supplemental education. Sylvan Learning Center is one such provider of supplemental education.

The reading methodology and pedagogy developed over the years has moved, sometimes drastically, from one end of the spectrum to the other, with whole language at one and "phonics only" at the other. The confusion surrounding these changes makes the reader's quest all that more difficult. Reading instruction methods have changed just as drastically. Thus, in

1997, Congress commissioned the National Reading Panel (NRP), a fourteen member group formed by the Secretary of Education and Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Three years after the inception of subgroups, the NRP presented their extensive findings. The NRP examined Alphabets, Fluency, Comprehension, Teacher Education and Technology. The NRP made an overwhelming recommendation for a balanced approach to reading instruction. This recommendation extends to supplemental education as well. At Sylvan Learning Center, the world's leading provider of supplemental education services, the balanced approach to reading instruction has been in place since 1979. The elements of Sylvan's major reading programs, Sylvan Academic Reading (2-12) and Sylvan Beginning Reading (K-2), directly align with the NRP's findings and recommendations. Of utmost importance is Sylvan's diagnostic-prescriptive model that determines a reader's needs and instructs accordingly, all the while balancing all the components that lead to comprehension.

The following synopsis of the National Reading Panel's findings, as well as that of other scientific research, reflects the subgroups identified by the Panel, as well as general reading instruction methodology, and explains how Sylvan Learning Center is directly aligned with those findings. Research into the teaching of reading is one of the largest fields of investigation in the education profession. The following compilation is, of necessity, abridged.

ALPHABETICS

Phonemic Awareness & Phonics Instruction

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the subgroups.*

Washington,DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Clearinghouse.

- Direct instruction in the use and application of phonemes was more efficacious than instruction without it, regardless of age, grade level and teaching conditions. This instruction led to improvement in phonemic and phonological awareness, reading and spelling, with substantially positive effects for Kindergarten and grade one. Even developmental readers were helped with this instruction.
- Younger students who received phonological awareness instruction showed significant improvement in decoding, spelling and comprehension.
- The best approach to phonics instruction is systematic and synthetic, using text written specifically to include certain phonetic principles. The presentation of one to two phonics generalizations per tutoring session was the most effective.

Ehri, L.C., Nunes, S.R., Willows, D.M., et al. (2001).

Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36, 250-287.

- Phonemic awareness (PA) and letter knowledge are the best indicators of school readiness and how successful a child will be in kindergarten and grade one. The measure of this knowledge indicates how well a child will learn to read.
- PA is a greater variable in a child's reading ability than socioeconomic status.

- Disabled readers have low/poor phonemic awareness.
- Non-readers have difficulty segmenting words.
- English is a graphophonetic language (based on sound-symbol relationships) that proves difficult for non-English speaking students whose native language is not sound-based.
- PA helps readers to read by sight, decoding and analogy to other known words.
- Phonemic awareness instruction makes a significant difference for older students who have not learned to read or received inappropriate instruction.
- Remediation of spelling deficits in older readers should not be addressed simply with phonological awareness instruction but by teaching spelling specifically via patterns, i.e. roots and syllabication.
- PA instruction boosts comprehension.
- First and second graders need to be assessed before direct phonemic awareness instruction is attempted.
- Instruction in letter knowledge, followed by application of this knowledge, is key.
- PA leads to better comprehension via automaticity, yet it is not the sole concern of reading instruction. PA instruction needs to be partnered with sight word, vocabulary, writing, spelling and comprehension, including oral, silent and listening, instruction.

Kame'enui, E., Adams, M., & Lyon, G.R. (2001). The challenge of learning to read.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/print.php?ID=93>.

- The lack of phonemic awareness is the most common reading problem encountered by today's readers.
- Teachers should implement scaffolding (a teaching method that provides modeling and questioning that lead the reader to insights and independent learning) in reading instruction.
- Phonemic awareness instruction should be part of a balanced approach.

Leslie, L. & Allen, L. (1999). Factors that predict success in an early literacy intervention project. *Reading Research Quarterly*, X, 404-424.

- Word identification paired with comprehension instruction encourages reading development.

Stoicheva, M. (2000). Balanced reading instruction. *ERIC Review*, 7, 29-30.

- Instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness, balanced with decoding text and comprehension instruction, has favorable results for early readers.

Sensenbaugh, R. (1996). Phonemic awareness: An important early step in learning to read. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest*, 119.

- Phonemic awareness is the best indicator of reading acquisition readiness.
- Learning to read is the result of phonological awareness. Reading, in turn, builds phonological awareness.
- A balanced approach of both phonics and literature instruction represents the most effective method of reading instruction.

Johnston, F.P. (2001). The utility of phonic generalizations: Let's take another look at Clymer's conclusions. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 132-150.

- Vowels are the most difficult phoneme for a reader to learn.
- Consonants are regular 95% of the time.
- Instruction in specific vowel combinations has greater use to the reader.
- Method of instruction should be phonogram instruction that leads to patterns (rimes). The brain

creates these patterns and uses them to decode words automatically.

- Pattern instruction, such as Consonant-Vowel-Consonant, as well as word-sorting, writing (encoding) and reading practice hold the greatest efficacy for learning to read.

THE SYLVAN METHOD of ALPHABETIC INSTRUCTION

Alphabetic instruction is one of the major tenants of Sylvan Learning Center's two reading programs, Sylvan Beginning Reading and Sylvan Academic Reading. Each reading program considers word analysis vital for learning to read. Students are assessed to determine appropriate placement in one of these reading programs. A personalized program is then developed for each student. In Sylvan Beginning Reading, students (K-2) begin multi-sensory instruction with letter knowledge as well as phonemic awareness instruction. These students receive systematic instruction in individual phonemes. The Sylvan Beginning Reading program follows a "spiral" curriculum to provide the repetition needed for younger and disabled readers. This is balanced with oral and silent reading and listening comprehension instruction using synthetic and authentic texts. Additional, and equally important, components include instruction in sight vocabulary and print awareness.

Students enrolled in Sylvan Academic Reading (2-12) receive the same balanced instruction. The four strands of this program are: Word Analysis, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Application & Extension. Every hour, students receive instruction from each of these four strands. Word Analysis begins with phonemic awareness instruction and continues into structural analysis, such as syllabication, affix and root instruction. Every student is post-tested on his or her phonemic

and phonological awareness to ensure retention of phonics generalizations and to determine if movement to the next instructional objective can begin. Within the same hour, reading instruction continues in the other strands. In vocabulary strand, students receive instruction in sight vocabulary, context, analogies, vocabulary development and word building strategies. In comprehension, students learn base skills such as main idea. They progress to critical reading skills, such as evaluating an author's purpose. Finally, within the application and extension strand, students learn to improve their study habits and oral reading.

VOCABULARY

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Clearinghouse.

- Instruction in vocabulary leads to gains in comprehension.
- As a learner's vocabulary expands, comprehension is enhanced.
- Vocabulary instruction must be level- and age-appropriate.
- Exposure to vocabulary in multiple contexts is ideal.
- A younger reader's vocabulary grows with repeated readings.
- Decoding a word alone is not effective if the word is not in a reader's vocabulary.

Ehri, L.C., Nunes, S.R., Willows, D.M., et al. (2001). Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36, 250-287.

- Vocabulary instruction must be included in the balance with phonemic awareness and comprehension instruction.

THE SYLVAN METHOD OF VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Reading students who attend Sylvan Learning Center for reading always receive vocabulary instruction. In Sylvan Beginning Reading, students are taught simple sight vocabulary appropriate for younger, early readers. This occurs, again, in a repetitive, multi-sensory fashion.

Sylvan Academic Reading students also receive a range of vocabulary instruction. Beginning with simple (grades 1-2) to advanced (grade 5) sight vocabulary, students are taught the most frequently occurring words in the English language. Students also receive instruction in context, analogies, synonyms, antonyms and homonyms. All students receive vocabulary development in which they learn reading-level appropriate words and vocabulary strategy instruction. Students are assessed at each level before proceeding through the program.

COMPREHENSION and FLUENCY

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Clearinghouse.

- Comprehension is the construction of meaning from print.
- Comprehension is aided when connected to prior knowledge and improves with strategy instruction.

- The multiple strategy method is recommended to include monitoring, graphic organizers, questioning, sequencing, story structure and summarizing.
- Problem solving, as well as metacognition, is also tied to reading success. Students need to be taught to monitor how well they are reading.
- Reading comprehension is a complex process related to vocabulary development.
- The text and the reader interact, requiring the reader to attend to what is being read.
- Automaticity in phonological awareness and fluency needs to be taught in order to increase comprehension.
- Guided oral reading has a positive effect on fluency and complete reading ability.
- Listening to stories contributes to literacy.
- Comprehension instruction needs to be paired with phonological awareness, vocabulary, thinking and spelling instruction.

Durkin, D. (1993). *Teaching them to read*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- Comprehension is the “essence of reading.”

Quartroche, D.J. (2000). Helping the underachiever in reading. *ERIC Review*, 7, 25-26.

- Instruction should provide for repeated exposure to connected texts.
- Comprehension instruction should consist of strategy instruction.

Stoicheva, M. (2000). Balanced reading instruction. *ERIC Review*, 7, 29-30.

- Comprehension instruction should be combined with decoding text and phonological awareness.

THE SYLVAN METHOD OF COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

As in the case of alphabetic and vocabulary instruction, Sylvan Learning Center balances instruction according to the needs of the student. Students in the Sylvan Beginning Reading program receive strategic comprehension instruction throughout the program, which contains 41 books and 129 lessons. They are given the opportunity to read both synthetic, decodable, connected and authentic texts at their reading level. Students are guided with questioning and strategy instruction to comprehend the text before them better.

Sylvan Academic Reading students also receive instruction in comprehension strategies to balance their programs. Within the comprehension strand there are 23 Intended Learning Outcomes broken into Base Skills (Main Idea, Drawing Conclusions, etc.), Mastery Skills (Figurative Language, Tone and Mood, etc.) and Integrated Skills (reading fiction and narrative and expository text). Students are instructed strategically through guided and independent practice. Within the Application and Extension strand of Sylvan Academic Reading, students receive oral reading instruction, which builds fluency. When students complete reading programs at Sylvan Learning Center, they are reading on or above grade level as strategic readers.

RESEARCH BASED GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS IN READING

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Clearinghouse.

- Reading instruction is not “one size fits all.” All instruction should adapt to the needs of the individual.
- Reading instruction should be adapted and connected to everyday reading.
- Direct instruction, in context, combined with a variety of methods, is highly recommended.
- The use of technology is a beneficial supplement to reading instruction. Growth in vocabulary results when computers are used to enhance that instruction.

Ehri, L.C., Nunes, S.R., Willows, D.M., et al. (2001). Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel’s meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36*, 250-287.

- Phonemic awareness instruction is effective when taught in small groups of readers weak in this area, as well as younger, readiness-level readers when measured by transfer to authentic reading.
- Small group instruction is effective, though more research in this area is needed.
- Techniques need to be motivating and engaging.

Sensenbaugh, R. (1996). Phonemic awareness: An important early step in learning to read. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest*, 119.

- Instruction for early readers should be fun, take place in group settings for the use of peer language, encourage experimentation and be structured around the individual.

Leslie, L.& Allen, L. (1999). Factors that predict success in an early literacy intervention project. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34*, 404-424.

- A well-planned and overseen tutoring program can help “at-risk” readers improve their reading skills.
- Programs should begin with an assessment on which the program is built to meet individual needs.
- Parental involvement is positively related to reading development.

Quartroche, D.J. (2000). Helping the underachiever in reading. *ERIC Review, 7*, 25-26.

- Reading instruction should take place in a small group or one-on-one.
- Coordination with the student’s school is key.
- Scaffolding, the process in which the instructor gradually releases the responsibility for knowledge acquisition to the student, encourages independence for struggling readers.

THE SYLVAN METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

Both Sylvan Beginning Reading and Sylvan Academic Reading begin with a complete assessment of the student’s reading and instructional needs. It is from that assessment that a student’s reading program is built. In either program, students are given direct instruction using traditional methods, such as reading literature and textbooks, while given the opportunity to use technology as a supplement to their learning. Sylvan students are taught in their own preferred learning “modality.” For example, in both programs, kinesthetic

learners use manipulatives, such as block letters or puzzles, to address a skill in their modality. Students are taught individually in a small group setting so that their needs are met, yet they receive the benefit of peer language. Students are positively reinforced constantly, which in turn builds their confidence and leads to more risk taking. Parents are involved via conferences every 12 hours of instruction; centers communicate directly with students' schools and teachers.

CONCLUSION

When students attend a Sylvan Learning Center, whether for reading enrichment or remediation, they receive a well-balanced, research-based, personalized program. While the educational community debates the best way to teach reading, Sylvan continues to design and implement reading programs that address students' specific needs and abilities. The Sylvan method aligns directly with scientific research. Sylvan students grow as readers through balanced instruction, leading them to become independent and successful readers. That goal and its achievement are what make Sylvan the world's leading provider of supplemental educational services.

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