



With Evidence-based Reading Interventions, Any Student Can Bloom

By Lorrie Wolf

Certified Member of the Academy of Orton-Gillingham

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The look of awe as they realize, "I am not stupid," is simultaneously amazing and heartbreaking to watch.

My years of doing remediation with people with dyslexia and other reading disabilities has allowed me to offer this glimpse of hope to people who have struggled for many years. Even struggling first graders know that they are different despite their best efforts. Imagine years of frustration during the school years and beyond if you saw yourself as stupid because reading and spelling were difficult. Yet these same students may be able to take an engine apart and rebuild it better than it was. Or they can add a column of complex numbers as fast as others can with a calculator. They do not lack intelligence, but something is interfering with the tasks of reading and spelling.

Spring is a season of growth and development. It is also a season when master gardeners will implement changes to a garden based on the plants that thrived and those that failed. Without evaluating what has worked and what has not worked, a gardener can continue to make the same costly mistakes in terms of time, effort and money. The same can be said for reading interventions. There have to be measurements and baselines to determine what is known and what is not mastered. Research has established what a good reader needs to be able to do by certain ages. If that is not happening on schedule, then interventions should be put in place to ensure the proper growth to allow a child to catch up with his peers. Otherwise, again, a lot of time, money and effort have been wasted.

Thousands of hours of research have been done to answer the following questions:

- How does a good reader read?



- How do students learn to read?
- Why do some students fail to learn easily?
- What is the relationship between language and reading?
- How can we be most helpful to students with problems?

This research was gathered by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the United States Office of Education, and numerous private universities and foundations. The National Reading Panel analyzed all this data and established what elements need to be in a good reading program. The following five components were identified as vital to a good reading program in the National Reading Panel Report:

Phoneme Awareness Development

- Teach what the speech sounds are—they are not the same as letters
- Use multisensory strategies—looking in a mirror during sound pronunciation, describing what the mouth is doing, moving chips or blocks to show sounds in words, tapping sounds on fingertips
- Link to letters as soon as the student is ready

Phonics and Word Recognition

- Teach the relationships between the letters and the individual sounds. For example: shock = /sh/ /ō/ /k/
- Systematic teaching of all useful correspondence patterns
- Sequential and logical progression of instruction
- Multisensory teaching using listening, speaking, reading, and writing together
- Explicit instructions with the concepts explained, not left to "discovery learning"
- Cumulative teaching with ample practice with "old learning" provided as new concepts are introduced

Fluency Development

- Reading text with sufficient speed to support understanding
- Includes accurate and fluent recognition of word parts (letters, letter groups, syllable patterns), words, phrases, sentences, and text
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Vocabulary Development

- Knowledge of the meaning of individual words, especially academic content area words
- Appreciation of multiple meanings
- Use of words in oral and written language

Comprehension Development

- Accessing background knowledge
- Knowing the meanings of individual words
- Understanding text structures
- Interpreting complex sentences
- Using specific comprehension strategies
- Constructing mental images of the concepts
- Making inferences and elaborating on text
- Monitoring one's own comprehension

In addition, mastery of spoken language (listening and speaking) and written expression should be added to this list of "essential components" because struggling students often need work in all aspects of oral and written language.

People with dyslexia and other reading and spelling difficulties need to hear the message on reading and spelling in a different way than their peers. It needs to be the same material but the presentation needs to be altered to our different target audience. The rules of our language need to be given in a logical way that builds on prior knowledge of letters, sounds, and the unique spelling rules of our language. There are rules; most of us were just never taught these rules so do not know how to share these with our children or students.

People who struggle with reading and spelling need to internalize the rules so they can apply them when they need them. That is the same justification my pastor gave my confirmation class for learning all those seemingly, endless Bible verses back all those many years ago. That same wise man told my class that there were four Gospels because



God was giving different people different ways to hear the same message of salvation.
Good teaching will always be geared to the learner's style, not the teacher's style.

Dyslexic students are most likely to do well when the majority of these conditions are in place:

- Early identification
- Explicit, systematic instruction designed for struggling students
- Progress-monitoring and evaluation of response to intervention
- Comprehensive programming, to include all components of literacy instruction and a complete curriculum that develops strengths while still addressing weaknesses
- Student self-advocacy and family support

Early identification is always best. However, this is not to say that changes and interventions made later in the seasons of life won't have good results. One of my newest middle school aged students told an observer during our lesson time that he had learned more in the last two months than he had in all his years at school. He was blooming although a bit later than he might have, but he was blooming.

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6004 B NW 9 Hwy. Parkville, MO 64152 (816) 584-8860