

The Reading Program - What It Is and Why It Works for Everyone

Why It Works for Everyone

Learning is as Natural as We Let It Be.

We don't really teach the child. We let the child learn. Children learn to talk, not because they get formal lessons in talking. There are no lessons needed because as I have said repeatedly, every new-born baby is a little learning machine. All it takes for infants to learn to talk is to be surrounded by people talking to them and encouraging their responses.

Eventually, these little learning machines will combine the sounds they hear into the words they hear as well. The in-born capacity to turn sounds into words is why every child learns to speak whatever language or languages are spoken to him or to her. Infants raised in multilingual environments learn two or three languages simultaneously as easily as they learn just one.

I mentioned in the [My Cousin Jean](#) section of [Chapter 10 - The Ten No's](#) that while I was in Iceland giving a workshop, I chatted with a child in Kindergarten who spoke English with me, Hindi with her grandmother and Icelandic with her teachers. That child had an Icelandic speaking father, an English-speaking mother and a Hindi speaking grandmother.

To make it possible for every child to learn to read and to write all we have to do is to make it possible for children to learn to read and to write the same way they learned to speak. Every child learns to talk because talking makes sense. Words are collections of sounds the child hears and puts together as words. The 44 sounds of the English language make up every English word a child learns to speak.

The Reading Program allows children to use these same 44 sounds to learn to read and to write in the same way they learned to speak. To speak, children put the 44 sounds together to make words. Reading words uses the same process. The child reads the sounds and says the words the sounds represent. Writing uses the same process. The child says (or thinks) the sounds and stamps them out.

Use of the Reading Program's 44 sound-images allows every child to make the same sense out of reading and writing as they made out of spoken words. Not every child learns to talk at the same rate as every other child. My cousin Jean learned faster than I did. It made no difference because learning is not a competition. Learning to talk is simply what every child does. Learning to read and to write is not a competition either. It is simply what every child can learn to do.

Why does the Reading Program work for every child? Because it makes reading and writing as easy for children to learn as it was for them as infants to learn to talk. It surrounds children with words written in sounds. Children can see the sounds, say the sounds and hear the words the sounds make. And, when ready, children can write (or stamp) these sounds as words. The Reading Program allows every child to become a confident reader and writer of words before any letter spellings of these words need to be introduced.

Using Letters

You might think that I am wrong in saying that children are already confident reader and writers of words before the letter spellings of words are introduced. Doesn't learning to read mean learning to read words spelled out?

Letters are only the symbols we use to record words. The words already exist without the letters. However, reading is traditionally taught as if the letters are the words. When the process of learning to read starts with letters, reading is easy for some and difficult for others. The children for whom the process is more difficult end up being taught that they are not as smart as the children for whom the process was easier. These little learning machines are given the mistaken impression that they are not good at learning, even though every one of these children has already mastered the most difficult learning task all of us ever faced – the learning of language when we were know-nothing newborns.

Learning to read with letters presents challenges for children that learning to talk did not. The letters themselves are confusing for some children both perceptually and in remembering the many different sounds that letters make. Using letters is not a problem once the concept is understood. Using letters only poses a problem when we assume the letters are the words and not just the symbols we use to write the words.

A child who has already learned to read and write words before the letter spellings of these words are introduced already understands the concept of both reading and writing. Children who understand the concept and can read and write with sounds will use their sight word vocabulary, Decoding Charts and Spelling Notebooks to write anything they wish, using words way beyond anyone's memorized vocabulary.

A Review from Chapter 12

Name: Joani Richardson

State: Utah

Number of years using the program: 5

Grade: 1

"..... Each year it gets better! I have better readers, spellers, writers. I

love this time of year because you can see the fruits of your labors - they read anything they want (not just the first grade basal, like the other classes), they can spell and understand why words are spelled in that way, and they can write, and write they do - it's so fun to see them enjoy each other's work too. I'm committed, there's no other way....."

The Girl in Kindergarten for the Third Year

The 1973-1974 school year was the first year Mary and I placed Reading Program kits in a school outside our own school district. Mary's student-teacher from her year teaching kindergarten in East Palo Alto was now a teacher in the Franklin-McKinley School District in San Jose. That teacher got her Principal's permission to let the three kindergarten classes at their school use the Program.

There was a girl in one of the classes who was now in kindergarten for her third year, which the girl's mother found upsetting. However, the mother was even more upset that her daughter, who could already read, would now be using a beginning reading program that she definitely did not need.

My first thought was how could any child be in kindergarten for a third year? To find out, I met with the mother. Her precocious daughter had been reading books since she was just three-years old, so her mother enrolled her in a school near where they then lived. The only enrollment she was permitted was kindergarten. Three-years of age was deemed to be too young for first grade enrollment. The next year, the family had moved, and the now four-year old daughter was again only permitted kindergarten enrollment. This third year, the same thing had happened. Once again, the family had moved and once again kindergarten was the only option for the now five-year old daughter.

The mother was annoyed enough that her daughter was still in kindergarten. However, her daughter's being asked to use a beginning reading program was just too much. At the teacher's request, I met with the mother to hear her complaints. I had the daughter read for me. She was definitely a very good reader.

I told the mother that I thought it would be better for her daughter to use the reading program along with all the other children at the start of the school year, so she would not be separating herself from her classmates when the kids were just getting to know one another. I suggested that the mother have her daughter use the program for a month and after a month if she still wanted her daughter not to use the program, I would arrange for her to be excused. Before the month was over, the mother called me and said her daughter loved the program and she (meaning the mother) really loved the program, as well.

The mother said that now her daughter could really read. Before she had a great sight vocabulary, but now she could read anything, not just the books that her parents had read to her. She was reading the writing on cereal boxes, the newspaper, and anything else with words on it. She was really reading, and now she was even writing too. The mother was now quite okay with having her daughter use the program.

The reason I have added this story here is because while the emphasis of this chapter is how the program is designed to meet the needs of the children who have difficulty in learning to read, as I said at the start, when you make it easy for the dyslexic child to learn to read you make it even easier for every other child, as well.

Starting with the sounds before a child even needs to know his or her letters lets every child, not just the dyslexic child, understand and master the concept of reading. Starting with the sounds and encouraging the children who catch on more quickly to help the children who need more time, ensures that every child learns with no child left behind. Starting with the sounds makes it possible to really end illiteracy in America.

Dyslexia Footnote

As was noted in [The Concept](#) section of this chapter, the Reading Program was designed specifically to meet the needs of dyslexic children. The list we used to guide the Program's design is included again below.

1 - Problems learning the names and sounds of letters. Letter names are taught in Picture Packets and posted on Alphabet Wall Cards on the classroom wall. The Decoding Chart teaches every child the many different sounds that letters make.

2 - Problems telling apart letters with similar shapes, such as “d” and “b” or “p” and “q”. Learning to write letters correctly is taught before letters need to be either read or written in words. The use of letters is not introduced until children can already read and write the words with sounds.

3 - Trouble associating sounds with letters or parts of words.

Associating sounds with letters is not needed as the child first learns to read since the words to be read are all sounds. The trouble associating is a problem that only exists when children are asked to read letters before they learned to read with sounds.

4 - Trouble sounding out new words. Not a problem when learning to read starts at reading two-sound words, and only eight sounds need to be known, and children work in teams to read the words.

5 - Trouble learning how sounds go together. Learning how sounds go together is no problem at all when all the words being read are composed of sounds, not letters.

6 - Trouble breaking words into sounds or relating letters to sounds when reading. A non-existent problem when the words do not have to be broken into sounds. The words are made up of sounds from the very beginning. There is also no difficulty in relating letters to sounds when reading when the first words read are just sounds and the children connect sounds to letters and not the other way around.

7 - Mixing up the position of sounds in a word. Mixing up the position of sounds in words only happens when the sounds are spelled with letters. The mix-up is caused by the letters and not the sounds.

8 - Difficulty spelling simple words. The Decoding Chart guides children in the spelling of words and the one-hundred sixty-one sight words can be spelled by every child.

9 - Spelling that's unpredictable and inconsistent. Spelling is, by its nature, unpredictable and inconsistent. However, the Decoding Chart helps every child make sense out of spelling words with letters, because each child already knows the sounds for any word.

10 - Confusing or reversing the order of letters in words. Confusing or revising the order of letters in words is a problem that accompanies learning to read with letters before learning to read with sounds. The child does not get the sounds in a word mixed up. The sounds are not at all confusing. Letters by themselves most definitely are.

11- Reading slowly or making errors when reading aloud. Reading is not a competition. What does reading slowly mean? The question is, "Can the child read?" If the answer is "Yes!" then speed is irrelevant. A child reading letters before learning to read with sounds will make errors that are caused by the child's confusion with the letters being read.

12- Poor phonological awareness and word attack skills. Definitely not a problem for any child who has used the Reading Program.

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize that words are made up of smaller units of sound (phonemes) and that changing and manipulating phonemes can create new words and meaning. Without a doubt, every child using the Reading Program has excellent Phonological awareness.

A child with poor phonological awareness may not be able to correctly answer these questions: What sounds do you think make up the word "hot" and are these different from the sounds that make "pot"? What word would you have if you changed the "p" sound in "pot" to an "h" sound? How many words can you think of that rhyme with the word "cat"? Not a single child who has learned to read using the Reading Program would have any trouble answering these three questions.

Word attack skills. Young children with dyslexia can also have problems with word attack skills. This is the ability to make sense

of unfamiliar words by looking for smaller words or collections of letters that a child has previously learned. For example, a child with good word attack skills may read the word "sunbathing" for the first time and gain a sense of the meaning of the word by breaking it down into "sun", "bath", and "ing". Learning to read with two and then three sound words, then phrases made up of two and three sound words allows each child to build his or her word attack skills slowly over time. Making sense of unfamiliar words is easy when every unfamiliar word is comprised of smaller words which the child has no trouble recognizing.

In summary, every problem dealt with, every single child learns. "Every" means 100% and not just 99.99%.

100% - Not 99.99% - A Message from [Chapter 12](#)

Is a learning rate of 100% for the 300,000 children in the ten-year study believable? Wouldn't there be at least one or two children who failed to learn to read?

If I had said there was a study done that asked the parents of 300,000 infants born over a ten-year period of time, infants who were all healthy and could both hear and make sounds, to use any measure each parent wished to assess if their infant had learned to talk. Would we be surprised to learn that, regardless of the measure any parent used, all 300,000 children would have learned to talk? Their rate of learning would have varied, as did my Cousin Jean's and mine, but every single infant would have learned to talk.

The Reading Program makes learning to read and to write as easy and as natural for children as it was for them to learn the language(s) they now speak. Just as 100% of healthy children who can hear and make sounds will learn to speak, 100% (not just 99.99%) of the children using the Reading Program will learn to read and write.